

Overcoming Trials and Tribulations

According to the
Qur'an and Sunnah



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ABD

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

PREFACE

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, we seek His aid and we ask for His forgiveness. We seek Allah's refuge from the evils of ourselves and the evils of our actions. Whomsoever Allah guides, there is no one to misguide him and whomsoever Allah misguides, there is no one to guide him. I testify that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah alone, who has no partner and I testify that Muhammad ﷺ is His slave and Messenger.

Allah ﷻ will continue to test us until we finally depart from this life by death. This is the overall theme of the book entitled 'Overcoming Trials and Tribulations'. It will attempt to evaluate the different types of tests we may experience throughout life - why they occur, how to cope with them successfully and the significance they have in relation to this life and our final destiny in the Hereafter. It will also attempt to highlight the problems (tests) we may unnecessarily create for ourselves if we choose to defy Allah's ﷻ Divine Laws and Guidance.

Sociological comparisons will be made between the Laws and Guidance of Islam and the misguidance of man-made theories and belief systems. The book will attempt to highlight the dangers (punishments) in following lusts and evil desires, while

also noting the specific rewards we can reap through adhering to Allah's Divine Ordinance.

Evidence to support Islamic knowledge and jurisprudence is largely taken from ayat of the Qur'an and ahadith from the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

The overall aim of the book is to inspire and uplift fellow Muslims and to provide an Islamic perspective to non-Muslims on the significance of certain trials and tribulations in life.

I pray Allah ﷻ accepts and rewards me for my humble efforts and forgives me for any mistakes I may have made. I welcome positive feedback and constructive criticism and the opportunity to correct any errors for future editions, insha'Allah.

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INTRODUCTION

Trials and tribulations are a common occurrence in life. No sooner is one problem overcome then another inevitably follows. This will continue throughout our lives until we finally depart from this world by death. Trials may range from something as trivial as missing the bus or burning the dinner, to something more serious such as the loss of a job, house or loved one. The former examples are man-made calamities, caused by human error, while the latter trials tend to be more Divinely inspired. Irrespective of the cause, all trials are ultimately predestined by the Will of Allah ﷻ. Only He is able to administer tests and only He is able to bring them to an end.

Allah ﷻ tests us throughout life in many different ways and for many different reasons. However, the main purpose of tests is to distinguish between those who worship Allah (alone) and those who associate partners in worship with Him (commit *shirk*). Throughout life, Allah ﷻ will also test our obedience and loyalty to Him by placing us in situations of difficulty and situations of ease. During these testing times, we can either accept His Decree and remain subservient to Him or we can rebel against His Decree and submit to the commands and demands of others. For example, we may choose to obey the shaytan or our own desires.

Allah ﷻ will also test our belief in the Hereafter to see whether we place more importance in this life or the life still to come. Those who strive in life for Allah's sake will be rewarded in Paradise, while those who do not will be severely punished in

the Hellfire. The more we refrain from forbidden temptations, and the more we struggle for Allah's sake with our wealth, lives, desires and emotions, the better our reward in Paradise, insha'Allah.

'And I (Allah) created not the jinns and humans except that they should worship me (alone).'' ¹

'To Him is the return of all of you. The promise of Allah is true. It is He who begins the creation and then will repeat it, so He may reward with justice those who believed (in the Oneness of Allah - Islamic Monotheism) and did deeds of righteousness. But those who disbelieved will have a drink of boiling fluids and a painful torment because they used to disbelieve.' ²

1. Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56

2. Surah Yunus 10:4

THE ORIGIN OF TESTS

The origin of tests can be traced back to the beginning of time, with the first generation of mankind - Adam and Hawa'. They were cast out from the Gardens of Paradise after eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. Allah ﷻ ordered them to spend an appointed time on earth to make amends for their disobedience to His Authority. During that time, they had to prove their allegiance to Him (alone) by following His Divine Laws and Guidance, rather than the temptations and misguidance of the accursed shaytan. Although we have not inherited the sin committed by Adam and Hawa', as their descendants we have inherited the same test. If we pass this test by remaining loyal and obedient to Allah ﷻ, we too shall be rewarded in Paradise, just as it was promised to Adam and Hawa'. However, if we choose to defy Allah ﷻ and follow our own mis-guidance, we shall be among the losers in the Hellfire.

'And We said: "O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in Paradise and eat both of you freely with pleasure and delight of things therein as wherever you will, but come not near this tree or you both will be of the dhalimun (wrongdoers)." Then the shaytan made them slip from Paradise, and got them out from that in which they were. We said: "Get you down, all, with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be a dwelling place for you and an enjoyment for a time." Then Adam received from his Lord words. And his Lord pardoned him (accepted his repentance). Verily, He is the One who forgives, (accepts

*repentance), the Most Merciful. We said: "Get down all of you from this place, then whenever there comes to you Guidance from Me, and whoever follows My Guidance, there shall be no fear on them, nor shall they grieve. But those who disbelieve and belie Our ayat (lessons, proofs, evidences, signs) such are the dwellers of the Fire, they shall abide therein forever."*³

Why are we tested?

Allah ﷻ states that every man and woman will be tested with difficulties, hardship and loss in life. Allah ﷻ tests us for the following reasons:

- 1) To distinguish between those who sincerely believe in Allah ﷻ and those who do not.

*'Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: "We believe and will not be tested."'*⁴

- 2) To encourage mankind to strive to do good deeds.

*'Who has created death and life that He may test who is best in Deed.'*⁵

- 3) To purify the soul and expiate sins.

*Whatever trouble, illness, anxiety, grief, pain and sorrow afflict a Muslim, even if it is the pricking of a thorn - Allah removes some of his sins because of it.*⁶

3. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:35-39

4. Surah al-Ankabut 29:2

5. Surah al-Mulk 67:2

6. Narrated by Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri (Bukhari and Muslim)

- 4) To distinguish between those who believe in the Hereafter and those who do not.

*'...We might test him who believes in the Hereafter from him who is in doubt concerning it: and the Lord watches over all things (All Knower of everything i.e. He keeps record of each and every person as regards deeds and then He will reward them accordingly).'*⁷

- 5) For believers to earn the reward of Paradise, if they remain patient and faithful to Allah ﷻ throughout adversity.

*'Did you think that you would enter Paradise without Allah testing those of you who fought hard in His cause and (also) test those who are As-Sabirin (the patient ones).'*⁸

Tests for Believers and Non-Believers

As mentioned before, Allah ﷻ tests His creation to distinguish between those who have faith and those who do not. The stronger they are in faith, the more He will test them. Although this may seem unfair, Allah ﷻ is never unjust. The more He tests the believers, the more He will reward them in return. The opportunities to earn the rewards of Allah ﷻ are equal for both men and women. However, the rewards for believers and non-believers are quite different. Rewards for non-believers are only awarded in this life, whereas the rewards for believers are awarded in this life and in the Hereafter. The reasons for this will soon become more apparent.

7. Surah Saba 34:21

8. Surah Al-Imran 3:142

A true believer will always try to remain obedient to his Creator. He will love his Lord and try to please Him through prayer and devoted acts of worship. He is also aware of his Lord's Almighty Power and Wrath and is fearful not to displease Him. A true believer is aware of the temptations and distractions in this life, but he is also aware of the Laws and limits laid down by his Lord. He, therefore, obeys his Lord and defers certain gratification in this life for the rewards that can be gained in the Next.

This life often feels like a prison to the true believer because of all the Islamic restrictions, sacrifices and severe hardships he has to endure. His life is spent in constant struggle between his own wanton desires and his moral conscience. However, Allah ﷻ is aware of all his efforts and self-sacrifice and will either reward him for it in this life or in the Hereafter (or both). Every time a believer makes a sacrifice for Allah's sake, his sins will be expiated.⁹ A good deed will also be written for him and its reward multiplied between ten and seven hundred times. Allah ﷻ provides incentives such as these to encourage us to strive harder and make more and more sacrifices in our lives.

*If a person embraces Islam sincerely, then Allah shall forgive all his past sins, and after that starts the settlement of accounts: the reward of his good deeds will be ten times to seven hundred times for each good deed, and an evil deed will be recorded as it is, unless Allah forgives it.*¹⁰

9. Narrated by Abdullah Ibn Umar ﷺ (Muslim)

10. Narrated by Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri ﷺ (Bukhari)

Worship consists of three levels of belief and striving:

- a) **Islam** - total submission and obedience to Allah ﷻ.
- b) **Iman** - true faith consisting of belief in the heart, speech of the tongue and action of the limbs.
- c) **Ihsan** - perfection of worship (performing worship and doing good deeds as though you see Allah ﷻ, and if you cannot achieve this feeling or attitude then you must remember that He sees you).

Every believer should try to live his life according to these three basic levels of worship.

The highest level of attainment in Paradise is *Al-Firdaus*, which is situated directly beneath Allah's Throne. This level is reserved in honour of the martyr,¹¹ who sacrificed his/her life in Allah's Cause.¹² Paradise descends through various levels reserved for people according to their strength of faith and level of striving. The more we strive in Allah's Cause with our lives, wealth, desires and emotions, the better our position will be in Paradise, insha'Allah.

Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: "The world is the believer's prison and the infidels' paradise."¹³

Paradise is surrounded by hardships and Hellfire is surrounded by temptations.¹⁴

11. Muslim fighters who die defending their faith; by plague; abdominal disease; drowning or a falling building; burns; pneumonia and delivery. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Bukhari)

12. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Bukhari)

13. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim, Riyad us-Saliheen)

14. Narrated by Anas b. Malik ﷺ (Muslim)

This life is like a paradise for the non-believer, as he appears to have fewer restrictions and make fewer sacrifices. However, this is the choice he makes and one that bears heavy consequences (penalties) in the Hereafter. He denies the existence of his Divine Creator and remains disobedient to His Divine Authority. The non-believer strives only to please himself and satisfy his own selfish desires rather than gain the pleasure of his Lord. However, by seeking instant gratification in this life, he sacrifices the best that is still yet to come. Allah ﷻ will deny him the pleasures in Paradise and grant him all that he desires in this life instead.

Allah ﷻ will test His creation to distinguish between those who turn to Him in times of need and those who do not. The ways in which believers and non-believers cope during trials are also radically different. Believers acknowledge and accept that their destiny is in the Hands of Allah ﷻ. For every blessing they receive, they are grateful to Allah ﷻ, and for every tragedy that befalls them, they accept and endure it patiently for the rewards it brings. Alternatively, they may express their pain and anguish to Allah ﷻ, but in private so as not to show disrespect or conflict with His Divine Will and Judgement.

When non-believers and weak Muslims are overwhelmed with stress, they often become frustrated and impatient, and find it difficult to control their emotions. Instead of suppressing their *nafs* (desires and emotions) to please Allah ﷻ, they please the shaytan by publicly expressing their disappointment and displeasure. Rather than turning to Allah ﷻ to alleviate their worries, they commit *shirk* by using forbidden methods of coping. They may rely upon superstition, spiritualism or astrology; or take solace in alcohol, drugs or music. As a result,

all their efforts to cope with life's problems are made in vain, as they are made with very little (if any) remembrance of Allah ﷻ.

Non-believers and weak Muslims may also fail to give thanks and praise to Allah ﷻ for His Kind Favours, especially in times of comfort and ease. Instead, they take full credit for all their success and achievements in life. When performing acts of charity, generosity or kindness, they may think they are deserving of reward and yet the intention to please Allah ﷻ and gain His rewards was totally absent.

'Say (O Muhammad): Shall We tell you the greatest losers in respect of (their) deeds?

Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds!' ¹⁵

The attitude of the true believer is vastly different:

Wonderful is the case of a believer - there is good for him in everything, and this is only for the believer. If he experiences a blessing, he is grateful to Allah - which is good for him, and if he experiences an adversity, he is patient, which is also good for him. ¹⁶

Allah ﷻ tests mankind in terms of their good deeds, acts of generosity, charity and self-sacrifice. Many people assume they will be rewarded with Paradise for all these virtues. However, Allah ﷻ will only accept and reward righteous good deeds if two basic conditions are met. Firstly, the intention for doing good deeds must be for Allah's sake alone, without any showing off or for praise, fame or gain.

15. Surah Al-Kahf 18:103-4

16. Narrated by Suhayb bin Sinan ؓ (Muslim)

Secondly, deeds must also be performed in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.¹⁷ The Prophet ﷺ clearly stated that if we are only motivated to perform acts of kindness for reasons of self-satisfaction or worldly credibility and gain, we will receive our rewards in this life, but at the expense of those in the Hereafter:

*The reward of deeds depends upon the intention and every man shall have that which he intended...*¹⁸

*Verily, Allah does not treat the believer unjustly in regard to his virtues. He would confer upon him (His blessings) in this world and would give him reward in the Hereafter. And as a non-believer, he would be made to taste the reward (of virtue in this world) what he has done for himself so much that when it would be the Hereafter, he would find no virtue for which he should be rewarded.*¹⁹

Although life is a prison for believers and a paradise for non-believers, these positions will be reversed in the Hereafter. On the Day of Judgement, Allah ﷻ will dip believers once in Paradise, and ask them if they experienced any hardships in the worldly life. Although they would have experienced many, they will reply that they had not. This is because the reward of Paradise compensates for all their misery and pain, and they will forget their suffering in this world. Similarly, non-believers will be dipped once in the Hellfire, and asked if they experienced any comforts and material blessing. Although they would have experienced many, they will reply that they had not.

17. Narrated by Aisha ؓ (Bukhari)

18. Narrated by Umar ؓ (Bukhari)

19. Narrated by Anas b. Malik ؓ (Muslim)

This is because the pain and misery in the Hellfire makes them forget all the enjoyment they may have had in this world.²⁰

It is important to note that although Paradise is granted to every sincere and faithful believer, some Muslims will be sent to the Hellfire for an appointed duration of time. The punishment they receive will be according to the gravity of their sins in this life. However, they will eventually be taken out by Allah's Mercy and transferred into Paradise. Non-believers, on the other hand, will receive no respite. Instead, they will remain in the Hellfire for eternity.

*There will be some whom the Fire would reach their ankles, some to their knees, some to their waist and to some it would reach up to their collar bones.*²¹

*Whoever said: "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah" and has in his heart good faith equal to the weight of an atom will be taken out.*²²

*"The deeds of anyone of you will not save you from the Hellfire." They said, "Even you, O Allah's Messenger ﷺ?" He said, "No, even I will not be saved unless and until Allah bestows His Mercy on me. Therefore, do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately, and worship Allah in the forenoon and in the afternoon and during a part of the night, and always adopt a middle, moderate, regular course whereby you will reach your target (Paradise)."*²³

20. Narrated by Anas b. Malik ؓ (Muslim)

21. Narrated by Samura b. Jundub ؓ (Muslim)

22. Narrated by Anas ؓ (Bukhari)

23. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Bukhari)

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TYPES OF TESTS

Although tests can be divided into general categories, we cannot claim to know their true significance and meaning, as our knowledge in this area is limited. Only Allah ﷻ possesses infinite knowledge and wisdom (*hikmah*), and so the reasons for each of our tests lie ultimately with Him. Allah ﷻ administers all tests by His Almighty Power and Command, to test our level of faith in Him. He decides and controls their purpose, severity, timing, duration and so on. Some trials may test our obedience and loyalty while others may serve to warn, teach, punish, or remind us to improve certain aspects of our faith or character. All tests from Allah ﷻ are essentially good, yet some ordeals in life are evil.

Evil tests are the direct result of our own making. Allah ﷻ provides Divine Laws and Guidance to save us all from calamities. If we choose to defy these Laws, we will inevitably create problems for ourselves. To illustrate this point, Allah prohibits the consumption of alcohol and intoxicants so we may avoid the many problems associated with alcohol or drugs. Similarly, Allah ﷻ commands us to observe segregation between men and women so we may reduce sexual desire and temptation and the associated problems of free mixing. Although the tests we create for ourselves are evil, we can derive some benefit and reward from them, especially if we admit our mistakes, sincerely repent to Allah ﷻ for forgiveness and correct ourselves in the future.

*'Whatever good reaches you, is from Allah; but whatever evil befalls you, is from yourself.'*²⁴

*'And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned. And He pardons much.'*²⁵

The tests we experience at any one time may be few or many in number. They may be predictable (as an inevitable consequence of our own actions) or occur spontaneously, simultaneously or consecutively. They may be isolated incidents or inter-related, lengthy in duration or relatively short-lived. They may cause mild discomfort to severe pain and distress and require great physical or mental mastery. While some tests are within our control, others may not be.

The type of tests we may endure in life will now be discussed in more detail, along with their merits and de-merits.

How Allah tests His creation

One of the ways in which Allah ﷻ tests the faith of His creation is by giving or depriving us of the things we love most. For example, He may provide us with children, take away the lives of close loved ones or deprive us of good health, material wealth and property.

We may be tested in our character and in our personal lives, for example in marriage, family, social or work relationships. We may even be tested in relation to our environment, for example with hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts and floods.

24. Surah an-Nisa 4:79

25. Surah Ash-Shura 42:30

Allah ﷻ will continually test us to see whether we can strive to put Him first, before our own selves, the shaytan, other people or other objects. Throughout our tests, we may need to combat our insecurities, fears or weaknesses, or suppress negative emotions such as anger, impatience, selfishness, jealousy or greed. We may also need to experience much pain, sorrow and self-sacrifice. The reasons for this will be explained in due course.

*'You shall certainly be tried and tested in your wealth and properties and in your personal selves...'*²⁶

*'And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to As-Sabirin (the patient ones).'*²⁷

Tests as punishments

Allah ﷻ sent His Divine Laws and Guidance to save us all from destruction. If we defy His Authority, He may choose to punish or remind us to correct our ways. If we remain defiant, He may continue to serve more severe punishments, until eventually there are no more reasons left for Him to hold back His most severe punishment - death. This is the worst punishment, as it puts an end to any chance of saving one's self through repentance and correction. Instead we shall be answerable for all our wrong actions on the Day of Judgement. Proof of Allah's destructive powers are cited throughout the Qur'an, with reference to the nations of past prophets.

26. Surah Al-Imran 3:186

27. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:155

He sent floods to the disbelieving people of Nuh عليه السلام. He sent plague and floods to the people of Musa عليه السلام and drowned the idol worshippers. He rained stones upon the disbelieving people of Lut عليه السلام for practising acts of homosexuality, and sent earthquakes to devastate the polytheists of Salih and Shua'ib عليه السلام. Allah's proofs are endless. Evidence of these disasters can still be seen today and Allah ﷻ knows best the reasons behind these. However, we must not attribute these events simply to the destructive forces of nature, without acknowledging the Power behind Allah's Divine Intervention.

*'See they not that they are tried once or twice every year (with different kinds of calamities, disease, famine, etc). Yet they turn not in repentance nor do they learn a lesson from it.'*²⁸

Non-believers are often ignorant of the purpose of Allah's punishment. Instead, they accuse Him of being wicked and unjust for taking the lives of so many 'innocent' people, especially women, children, the frail and the elderly. However, Allah ﷻ is not wicked or unjust. He is Most Merciful, Fair and Generous. If Allah ﷻ sends a punishment upon a nation, then it befalls the whole population indiscriminately. Each person will then be resurrected (and judged) according to his own deeds.²⁹ If Allah ﷻ takes the lives of the believers and the innocent, it is perhaps as a mercy to remove them from their pain and suffering in this world. If He takes the lives of the disbelievers, tyrants and oppressors, it is perhaps to stop the harm and injury they cause to others. Whatever His reasons, justice will always prevail, whether it is in this life or in the Hereafter.

28. Surah At-Taubah 9:126

29. Narrated by Ibn Umar رضي الله عنه (Bukhari)

Unfortunately, non-believers place too much emphasis on this life and perceive death as an end in itself. However, death is just the beginning of the eternal life of the Hereafter.

Not all punishments result in death, however. Some are just merely unpleasant. The only way we can stop them is to refrain from prohibited habits and lifestyles, as Allah ﷻ has warned that He will never change our situation unless we make the effort to change ourselves. This not only applies to us on an individual level, but also on a wider, more collective scale:

'For each person there are angels in succession, before and behind him. They guard him by the Command of Allah. Verily! Allah will not change the good condition of a people as long as they do not change their state of goodness themselves (by sinning and being ungrateful and disobedient to Allah). But when Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning back of it and they will find Him no protector.' ³⁰

Punishments are often perceived negatively, when in fact they should be viewed positively. When Allah ﷻ serves His punishment in this life, it provides the opportunity for self-scrutiny, repentance and correction. Punishment in this life is also an expiation for our sins and lessens the punishment we (as believers) would have received for our sins in the Hellfire:

When Allah desires good for His servant, He gives him punishment beforehand in this world, but when He desires an evil purpose for His servant, He refrains from dealing with his sin till he takes from him full payment for it on the Day of Resurrection. ³¹

30. Surah ar-Ra'd 13:11

31. Narrated by Anas ؓ (At-Tirmidhi, Riyad us-Saliheen)

When Allah withholds His punishment, some people continue to indulge in their 'sinful' or immoral behaviour because they believe they can 'get away it'. This is like the child who thinks that he has escaped punishment from his parents for being naughty and so continues to be naughty. However just like the child, these people lack the maturity and foresight to realise that punishment can often be delayed and be more severe later on. Hence the above hadith warns us not to be lulled into a false sense of security. We should constantly monitor our actions and behaviour and correct ourselves. If we do not, we will continue to accumulate sins and incur the corresponding escalation of punishment in the Hereafter.

Although we would prefer to receive Allah's punishment in this life rather than in the Grave and the Hellfire, we should never ask Allah ﷻ for this. Instead, we should ask Him to grant us good in this life and in the Hereafter and save us from the torment of the Hellfire. ³²

Tested by our own selves

Allah ﷻ created each of us with a unique character to test us, individually, in faith. Although some tests may appear similar, they are in fact slightly different, as each test is tailored to suit the nature, ability and capability of the individual. Allah ﷻ never administers a test more severe than we can bear, neither does He expect us to bear the burden of tests He administers to others.

32. Narrated by Anas ؓ (Muslim)

Tests may provide the opportunity to practise or improve potential skills, talents and flairs. They may also be administered to see whether or not we can suppress negative emotions, evil desires and temptations (i.e. to refrain from abuse, backbiting, gossiping, suspicion, being two-faced, jealous, impatient etc). We are all created with particular strengths and weaknesses and find certain tests easier or more difficult to bear than others. However, the more we employ our finer qualities or struggle to correct deficiencies in our character, the greater our rewards in return.

Somebody asked, "O Allah's Messenger ﷺ! Who is the best among the people?" Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied, "A believer who strives his utmost in Allah's cause with His life and property." They asked, "Who is next?" He replied, "A believer who stays on one of the mountain paths worshipping Allah and leaving the people secure from his mischief." 33

Some people asked Allah's Messenger ﷺ, "Whose Islam is the best?" (i.e. who is a very good Muslim?) He replied, "One who avoids harming Muslims with his tongue and hands." 34

Sometimes we are tried by the same tests over and over again and often in the most sensitive and weakest areas of our lives. Although this may be frustrating, Allah ﷻ tests our weaker points in order that we may strive to strengthen or correct them. The more pain we experience, the more de-sensitised we may become to it. However, if the pain persists, it shows we may need to strive that little bit harder. The severity of our tests reflects our own level of Iman.

33. Narrated by Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri ؓ (Bukhari)

34. Narrated by Abu Musa ؓ (Bukhari)

The stronger our Iman and the more we strive to strengthen our faith and character, the more difficult our tests will become. Yet, the more pain and distress we experience, the more rewards we shall reap in return and the more likely it is that our sins will be forgiven.

I asked the Prophet ﷺ who among the people are most severely tried? He said: "The Prophets, then the right acting people, and so on down through various categories of people. Man will be tested according to the strength of his faith. The stronger his faith, the more severe his trial, and the weaker his faith, the lighter his trial. The believer will be continually tested until he walks on earth with all his wrong actions forgiven." 35

The greatness of reward is accompanied by the greatness of distress. If Allah ﷻ desired a people, He sorely tried them by torment. And if He is pleased with that, all the content is for them, and that whom He is annoyed with, all the wrath is for them. 36

Allah ﷻ created men and women with specific gender characteristics to test them in faith. The test for men and women is to learn, understand and respect their similarities and differences and to use this understanding to live together more amicably. Allah ﷻ also created men and women with certain desires and inclinations. The Qur'an and Sunnah mention the type of people who will inhabit Paradise and the type of people who will inhabit the Hellfire. The majority of the inhabitants of Hellfire will not only be arrogant and proud but many will be women, for their inability to refrain from gossip, backbiting and

35. Narrated by Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas ؓ (Bukhari)

36. (At-Tirmidhi, Riyad us-Saliheen)

manipulating men with their seductive, feminine charms. They shall also enter the Hellfire for being ungrateful to their husbands. This should not be misinterpreted to imply that only women gossip, backbite, flirt and show ingratitude, as both sexes have the potential to behave in each of these ways. Allah ﷻ has guaranteed Paradise for men and women who strive hard to suppress these negative tendencies:

*The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Shall I not inform you about those who are entitled to Paradise? Every weak, modest man is accounted as weak and looked down upon. If he adjures by Allah, He will certainly fulfil it. Now shall I inform you about the inmates of hell? Every ignoble, impertinent and proud man."*³⁷

*The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "I stood at the door of paradise; and I saw the majority who entered it are of the poor, and the men of abundance were kept confined in addition to the inmates of the Fire who had been ordered to enter the Fire; and I stood at the door of the Fire and the majority who entered it were women."*³⁸

*The Prophet ﷺ said: "I was shown the Hellfire and that the majority of its dwellers were women who were ungrateful. "It was asked, "Do they disbelieve in Allah?" He replied, "They are ungrateful to their husbands and are ungrateful for the favours and the good (charitable deeds) done to them. If you have always been good (benevolent) to one of them and then she sees something in you (not to her liking), she will say, "I have never received any good from you."'"*³⁹

37. Narrated by Haritha bin Wahab (Riyad us-Saliheen)

38. Narrated by Usama bin Zaed (Agreed Upon)

39. Narrated by Ibn Abbas (Bukhari)

Men and women are also tested in relation to sexual desire and temptation. However, Allah ﷻ helps to reduce illicit desire and temptation by providing specific codes for sexual conduct and gender relationships (dress codes, manners, speech and so on). This will be discussed in detail in a following section.

Psychology is the scientific study of the human mind. Although it has a tendency to compartmentalise or simplify complex attitudes and behaviour patterns, this subject provides a fascinating insight into human life and social behaviour. In fact, Allah ﷻ revealed this knowledge relating to the intricate aspects of human nature over fourteen hundred years ago and this is contained within the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. It is also a more accurate account than the psychology taught in many universities today, which is natural since it is Divine Knowledge from the Creator Himself. Islam is a complete way of life. The more we learn about Islam, the more we learn about ourselves and how we can best relate and interact with other people. Islam also helps us to recognise common human traits and identify our own strengths and weaknesses. It also teaches us to be honest with ourselves, to acknowledge our limitations, as well as our potential for improvement.

When a piece of machinery breaks down, we naturally refer to the maker's manual rather than struggle in a vague attempt to fix it ourselves. In the same way, when Allah ﷻ sends us tests, He does not leave us to find our own solutions, but provides instructions for rightly guided behaviour in the form of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. The more we adhere to these instructions, the more we will benefit in this life and in the Hereafter.

*'You have an excellent example to follow in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad ﷺ) for all who hope in meeting with Allah and the Last Day.'*⁴⁰

Tested by other people

Throughout our lives we will come into contact with many people, each diverse in character, culture, faith and spirituality. Some people will share our values and beliefs, while others will not. Allah ﷻ guides us towards certain people as a test of our loyalty and obedience to Him. This is because some people may sway us in our beliefs by their sense of charm, power or authority or by their charismatic style of leadership or speech. However, we should not be easily misled from the truth. Instead, we should remain firm in our convictions and defend ourselves against those who innovate, oppose, insult or betray the Islamic faith.

*'O you who believe! Take not for Auliya (supporters and helpers) your fathers and your brothers if they prefer disbelief to belief. And who so ever of you does so, then he is one of the dhalimun (wrong doers). Say: "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred; the wealth you have gained, the commerce in which you fear decline, and the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment)." And Allah guides not the people who are Al-Fasiqun (rebellious, disobedient to Allah).'*⁴¹

40. Surah Al-Ahzab 33:21

41. Surah At-Tauba 9:23-24

The company we keep is extremely important in Islam. We are advised to keep good company with strong practising Muslims as far as possible. We should always associate with believers who fear Allah ﷻ and strive to do good deeds, and who also help us to refrain from committing sins such as slander, backbiting, gossip and suspicion. This does not mean that we should segregate ourselves from non-practising Muslims or non-Muslims. We should keep good relations with all people, especially our relatives, as this is a form of *da'wa*. However, we should be aware that keeping good company will protect us from negative influences or corruption.

*'O you who believe! Be afraid of Allah, and be with those who are true (in words and deeds).'*⁴²

*'If you obeyed most of those on earth they would mislead you far from Allah's Path. They follow nothing but conjectures, and they do nothing but lie.'*⁴³

*A man follows his friend's religion, so each one should consider whom he makes his friend.*⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Allah ﷻ may guide us into contact with certain people to test our levels of patience and tolerance. Although Islam commands us to be tolerant of people with different beliefs, and to treat them with justice and kindness,⁴⁵ we may find that we do not receive the same treatment in return. Instead, we may experience prejudice, discrimination, hostility and ridicule.

42. Surah at-Tauba 9:119

43. Surah al-An'am 6:116

44. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud)

45. Surah Al-Mumtahinah 60:8

*'Beautified is the life of this world for those who disbelieve, and they mock at those who believe. But those who obey Allah's Orders and keep away from what He has forbidden will be above them on the Day of Resurrection.'*⁴⁶

Whatever suffering Muslims may experience, Allah ﷻ will reward them highly for their loyalty to Him during these heavy tests of faith. He will also punish every tyrant, oppressor and disbeliever on the Day of Judgement with a painful torment in the Hellfire.⁴⁷

*'And those who annoy believing men and women undeservedly, bear on themselves the crime of slander and plain sin.'*⁴⁸

Whoever has oppressed another person concerning his reputation or anything else, he should beg him to forgive him before the Day of Resurrection when there will be no money to compensate for wrong deeds, but if he has good deeds, those good deeds will be taken from him according to his oppression which he has done, and if he has no good deeds, the sins of the oppressed person will be loaded upon him.⁴⁹

Some people will say or do almost anything to discourage true Muslims in their Islamic belief and practice. They will never be satisfied until Muslims join them in their indulgence of the forbidden, such as unlawful mixing or immodest dressing. It is important that we do not compromise in our Deen to please other people before Allah as this would be a form of *shirk* for

46. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:212

47. Surah al-Buruj 85:10

48. Surah Al-Ahzab 33:58

49. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Bukhari)

which we can be punished in Hellfire. Our most important aim is to gain the Pleasure of Allah ﷻ first and foremost, then to please others so long as it does not transgress the limits set by Allah.

*'O you who believe! Take not as bitanah (friends, advisors, protectors, helpers etc), those outside your rank since they will not fail to corrupt you. They desire to harm you severely. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse. Indeed they have made plain to you the ayat (proofs, evidences, verses) if you understand.'*⁵⁰

Tests involving health

All tests require some kind of mental or physical striving, but none more so than those involving our health. Allah ﷻ may test our faith by afflicting either close loved ones or ourselves with varying degrees of physical or mental sickness. Illness may be as mild as the common cold or as severe as paralysis, and while some illnesses may be within our control, through the use of drug treatment and therapy, others may not be so manageable. Whatever the condition may be, ill health has both advantages and disadvantages.

The disadvantage of ill health is the reduction or loss of potential rewards from performing acts of worship and doing good deeds, due to mental or physical restraints. This is why Allah ﷻ warns us to make more of an effort in our Deen while we are still capable, before we are overcome by sickness or death.

50. Surah Al-Imran 3:118

Death severs all rewards (except recurring charity, knowledge that continues to benefit people, or a pious child to invoke Allah on our behalf, as these acts will continue to earn rewards even after our death⁵¹). We are advised to adopt the following attitude to help motivate us more in our Islamic practice:

If you survive until the evening, do not expect to be alive in the morning, and if you survive until the morning do not expect to be alive in the evening, and during health prepare for illness and while you are alive prepare for your death. ⁵²

Although illness and disease are difficult tests to endure, they do have their advantages. Sickness is a spiritual mercy and blessing from Allah ﷻ, through which we can earn His rewards and expiate our sins.

With whosoever the Lord desires to be kind and merciful, He subjects him to pains and troubles. ⁵³

You will have a double reward for being sick, and your sins will be annulled as the leaves of a tree fall down. ^{54, 55}

No pain or sorrow or trouble comes upon a believer - not even a thorn pricks him - but his sins are pardoned. ⁵⁶

We should always try to visit fellow brothers/sisters in Islam when they are ill, as there are many rewards to be earned by this act of kindness.

51. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim)

52. Narrated by Ibn Umar ﷺ (Bukhari)

53. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muwatta Imam Malik)

54. Narrated by Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ (Agreed Upon)

55. Narrated by Abdullah ﷺ (Bukhari)

56. Narrated by Al'sha ﷺ (Muwatta Imam Malik)

If we visit a fellow Muslim in the morning, seventy thousand angels will invoke blessings on us until the evening. If we visit them in the evening, seventy thousand angels will invoke blessings on us until the morning and an orchard of fruit trees will be allotted for us in Paradise.⁵⁷ This illustrates how rewarding sickness can be, both to the one who is afflicted and the visitor. Allah ﷻ is closer to us during sickness than in times of good health, and our prayers at this time are compared to the prayers of angels. We should, therefore, make many supplications during sickness, not only for ourselves, but also for other people, as Allah ﷻ will always respond to the prayers of those who are ill.

When you visit a sick person, ask him to pray for you since a sick person's prayers are like that of angels. ⁵⁸

Although euthanasia (mercy killing) is still a controversial issue, it is becoming more widely practised to remove the pain and suffering of the terminally ill. However, in Islam it is strictly forbidden. Illness is a test from Allah ﷻ for both the afflicted (sick person) and the non-afflicted (family or carers). The test during illness is to endure the pain with patience and to accept the Qadr (destiny/Divine Will) of Allah ﷻ. Only Allah ﷻ has the Power to give life and take it away. We should rest assured that the pain will eventually ease and relief will soon follow, whether through recovery, remission or natural death. It is reassuring to note that illness is non-existent in Paradise and the inhabitants will enjoy good health forever. ⁵⁹

57. Narrated by Ali ﷺ (At-Tirmidhi)

58. Narrated by Umar bin al-Khattab ﷺ (Ibn Majah)

59. Surah Al-A'raf 7:43. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim)

Tests involving the death of loved ones

*'Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives and the fruits of your toil, but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere. Who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return."'*⁶⁰

Allah ﷻ may test our faith by taking the lives of close loved ones. The emotional pain and suffering during bereavement may be so intense that it can either strengthen our faith or cause us to abandon it altogether. Allah ﷻ tests us to see if we can conquer overwhelming feelings of shock, anger, denial or depression, by turning to Him for comfort and support during these difficult times of despair. Those who prefer to outwardly express these emotions, rather than suppress them, deny the Qadr of Allah ﷻ and show disrespect to His Divine Decree. In Islam, we are permitted to weep and express our loss, but such excesses as wailing aloud, tearing our clothes, beating our bodies, questioning 'why' etc. are strictly forbidden. Instead, we should try to remain calm and patient throughout personal adversity:

Allah ﷻ said: "I have no reward other than Paradise for my believing servant who is patient when I take away one of his beloved from among his companions of the world."⁶¹

When a loved one dies, it is very tempting to question or complain about the timing of their death. This shows blatant disrespect to Allah ﷻ, because He is the Controller of Time and the Creator and Disposer of Life. He manages all of our affairs,

60. Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 155-156

61. Narrated by Abu Huraira (Bukhari)

causing everything to happen at the right time for the right reasons. No matter how difficult bereavement may be, we should never criticise its timing, as life is ultimately in His Hands. In Islam, mourning the death of a close loved one should last no more than three days. The only exception is in the case of a woman upon the death of her husband when her iddat (waiting period) lasts for a period of four months and ten days.⁶²

The death of a child is an extremely difficult test to endure. This can happen during pregnancy, labour, or several weeks, months or years following birth. When parents experience the death of a child, it is important for fellow Muslims to offer help, comfort and support during this grief-stricken time and advise them in the best Islamic manner. The following ahadith should provide some comfort to grieving parents:

I said to Abu Huraira that my two children had died. Would you narrate to me anything from Allah's Messenger ﷺ, a hadith, which would soothe our hearts in our bereavements? He said: "Yes. Small children are the fowls of Paradise.⁶³ If one of them meets his father (or he said his parents) he would take hold of his cloth, or he said with his hand as I take hold of them of your cloth (with my hand). And he (the child) would not take off (his hand) from it until Allah causes his father (parents) to enter Paradise."⁶⁴

62. Narrated by Zainab bint Abi Salama (Bukhari)

63. The word used in the text is Da'amis, the plural of Da'amus which means 'a fowl of the sea.' Just as fowls of the sea do not separate from water, in the same way these small children constantly remain in Paradise.

64. Narrated by Abu Hassan (Muslim). This hadith has been narrated on the authority of Tamim with the same chain of transmitters. And he is reported to have said: "Did you hear from Allah's Messenger ﷺ anything, which may soothe our heart in our bereavements?" He said: "Yes."

A woman came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with her child and said, "Allah's Apostle, invoke Allah's blessing upon him for I have already buried three." He said: "You have buried three!" She said: "Yes." There upon he (the Holy Prophet ﷺ) said: "You have indeed, safeguarded yourself against the torment of hell with a strong safeguard."⁶⁵

When a child of a believing servant of Allah dies, Allah asks His angels, "Have you taken into custody the soul of My servant's child?" and they answer, "Yes." Then he inquires, "Have you taken into custody the soul of the flower of his heart?" and they reply, "Yes." Then He questions, "What did My servant say?" and the angels answer, "He praised You and affirmed: 'To Allah do we belong and to Him will we return.'" Upon hearing this, Allah commands: "Build for My servant a mansion in Paradise and name it 'The House of Praise.'"⁶⁶

The concept of death can evoke a wide range of emotions, but on a more personal level it should remind us of our own mortality. Bereavement is a time for self-reflection and evaluation. It gives us the opportunity to question or re-affirm the reason and purpose for our existence and to prepare for our own life after death. Unfortunately, many people soul search in the wrong direction, without realising that Islam is the truth and has answers for all life's questions. Allah ﷻ will cleanse the hearts of sincere believers and fill them with faith and understanding and guide them towards success.

*'Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills.'*⁶⁷

65. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Muslim)

66. Narrated by Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri ؓ (At-Tirmidhi)

67. Surah Ibrahim 14:4

*'We have indeed sent down in this Qur'an manifest ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, lawful and unlawful things, and the set boundaries of Islamic religion that make things clear showing the Right Path of Allah). And Allah guides whom He wills to a Straight Path (i.e. to Allah's Religion of Islamic Monotheism).'*⁶⁸

*'Have you seen him who takes his own lust (vain desires) as his god, and Allah knowing him as such, left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and put a cover on his sight. Who then will guide him after Allah? Will you not then remember?'*⁶⁹

Although death is perceived as a loss, it should also be perceived as a gain, as it is an opportunity for us to reflect upon our own lives and correct ourselves before death finally comes to us too.

Tests involving sexual temptation, material wealth and children

Although some tests appear bad, they may contain hidden benefit and goodness. Similarly, some tests may appear good, but in fact they are bad. For example, it is often assumed that if Allah ﷻ is pleased with a person, He blesses them with money, a spouse, or the ability to conceive children, but if He is angry with a person, He punishes them by leaving them single, barren or poverty-stricken. However, this is not always the case, as Allah ﷻ only rewards or punishes a person according to their attitude or behaviour in these given situations.

68. Surah An-Nur 24:46

69. Surah al-Jathiyah 45:23

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69. Surah al-Jathiyah 45:23

For example, Allah ﷻ will only punish us if we mis-spend our wealth or abuse our spouse and children. Conversely, Allah ﷻ will only reward us if we spend our wealth on charitable causes, and treat our spouse and children with kindness, and encourage them to behave in a more Islamic manner. Similarly, Allah ﷻ will only reward us for tests of poverty or childlessness if we remain patient for His sake. In the following verses, Allah ﷻ states that He will provide and deprive us of wealth, a spouse or children, to test us in faith:

*'Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas Allah! With Him is a great reward (Paradise).'*⁷⁰

*'...and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know.'*⁷¹

*'...He creates what He wills. He bestows children, male and female according to His will. Or he bestows both males and females, and He renders barren that whom He wills. Verily He is the All-Knower and is Able to do all things.'*⁷²

*'And We sent no prophet unto any town (and they denied him), but We seized its people with suffering from extreme poverty (or loss in wealth) and loss of health and calamities, so that they might humiliate themselves (and repent to Allah).'*⁷³

These tests will now be discussed separately in more detail.

70. Surah at-Taghabun 64:15

71. Surah al-Baqarah 2:216

72. Surah Ash-Shura 42:49-50

73. Surah al-A'raf 7:94

Tests involving sexual temptation

Allah ﷻ created mankind with many basic instincts, but none so powerful or potentially dangerous as the sexual urge. The faith of every Muslim is tested by this urge, particularly in the ability to control or subdue it. In Islam, we are prohibited from gazing with desire at those whom we are not married to and from having sexual relations with them. We are also expected to refrain from sexual relations with marriage partners from dawn until dusk during the sacred month of Ramadan. If we break this ruling, we will lose our fast and the rewards that would have accompanied it. We will also be expected to make atonement for our disobedience to Allah ﷻ. Sexual relations are also prohibited during the time of menstruation (*hayd*) and post-natal bleeding (*nifas*) for women.⁷⁴

*'Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them... And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (ordinarily) appear thereof...'*⁷⁵

*'Allah wishes to lighten the burden for you; and man was created weak (cannot be patient to leave sexual intercourse with women).'*⁷⁶

Man is created weak and often finds it difficult to refrain from sexual intercourse. Although Allah ﷻ uses this weakness to test our faith, He also provides strict guidance for social interaction

74. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:222

75. Surah An-Nur 24:30-31

76. Surah An-Nisa 4:28

between the sexes, to help reduce illicit sexual desire and temptation outside marriage. Men and women are required to lower their gaze and guard their modesty and adhere to certain dress codes and conduct. If Muslims find it difficult to control sexual arousal, they are advised to marry. If they do not have the financial means to marry, they should fast, as this will help to subdue sexual passion.⁷⁷ One of the greatest temptations for men is women (and vice versa). In fact, the first trial sent to the people of Isra'il was caused by women to see how they would behave.⁷⁸ The Prophet ﷺ also warned men of the dangers caused by women, as they have the potential to lure them away from their spiritual and worldly obligations.

*Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: "I have not left after me any turmoil more injurious to men than the harm done to men because of women."*⁷⁹

Allah ﷻ revealed the types of women that are lawful and unlawful to men. Those who are unlawful include those to whom one is not married, mothers, daughters, sisters etc.⁸⁰ There are also ahadith highlighting the importance of segregation between men and women. Segregation helps to reduce sexual temptation and prevent unnecessary jealousy. It can also prevent unnecessary suspicion within the community, which can lead to gossip, accusation, and tarnishing of one's honour and reputation. Although suspicion and slander are haram in Islam, free mixing can easily provoke this kind of gossip and rumour.

77. Narrated by Alqama ؓ (Bukhari)

78. Narrated by Abu Sa'eed Khadri ؓ (Muslim)

79. Narrated by Usama b. Zaid ؓ (Muslim)

80. Surah An-Nisa 4:23

It is therefore important to observe this etiquette to safeguard one's reputation and avoid unnecessary *fitna* in the community. When a man and a woman meet in seclusion without a *mahram* (guardian/protector/chaperone), the third person in their company is the shaytan, who may whisper and lead them astray.⁸¹ Once this happens, the social implications are vast, as we will shortly discuss.

*'When you ask women for something, ask from behind a curtain, that is purer for your hearts and their hearts.'*⁸²

*No one of you should meet a woman apart unless she is accompanied by a relative within prohibited degrees (a mahram).*⁸³

Although the first ayah instructs men on how to behave towards the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, it is nevertheless a practice we should also strive to adopt wherever possible, as it will avoid unnecessary annoyance to the woman and prevent the jealousy of her husband. It will also help to reduce suspicion and gossip from onlookers.

In Islam, not only is it *haram* to commit adultery, but it is one of the major sins in Islam. The person who commits this abhorrent act is the most contemptible in Allah's Eyes. Adultery does not solely refer to the sexual act performed by the loins; it refers to the entire human body, as every body part has the potential to stray.

81. See hadith narrated by Amir ibn Rabi'ah ؓ (Ahmad) which refers to shaytan being the third person tempting a man and woman without a *mahram*.

82. Surah Al-Ahzab 33:53

83. Narrated by Ibn Abbas ؓ (Agreed Upon)

Allah has fixed the very portion of adultery which a man will indulge in. There will be no escape from it. The adultery of the eye is the look, and the adultery of the ears is the listening to voluptuous (song or talk), and the adultery of the tongue is licentious speech, and the adultery of the hand is the embrace, and the adultery of the feet is to walk to the place where he intends to commit adultery and the heart yearns and desires which he may or may not put into effect.⁸⁴

Muslims who obey Allah ﷻ and refrain from illegal sexual intercourse will receive the following reward on the Day of Resurrection:

*One of the seven categories of people shaded under Allah's Shade on the Day of Resurrection, when there will be no shade but His, is a man who refuses the call of a charming woman of noble birth for illegal sexual intercourse and says: "I am afraid of Allah."*⁸⁵

Allah ﷻ also tests our obedience through other sexual prohibitions, like intercourse between members of the same sex, with animals or with those ignorant/innocent of sexual matters, such as children or the mentally retarded.

Allah ﷻ sends His Laws and Guidance for the good of mankind and to benefit society as a whole. In spite of this, many people still ignore or reject these laws in favour of following their own lusts and desires. Marriage provides emotional security and financial stability as well as structure, order and discipline to society. It is the foundation of a healthy society and a sign of

84. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim)

85. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Bukhari)

commitment and responsibility. It is important for couples to work through any conflict and resolve their differences rather than take the apparently easier option of divorce. However, divorce has wider repercussions, not only for other family members, but for society as a whole. Divorce not only severs the relationship between husband and wife, but it can also sever or disrupt the relationship between parent and child(ren). As the divorce rate continues to rise, so too does the rate of single parent families. These are just some of the reasons why divorce is most hated by Allah ﷻ, despite being permitted in Islam.⁸⁶ Divorce should only be used as a last resort, when every effort to resolve the couple's differences fail and the marriage has irrevocably broken down.

When other less favourable arrangements become acceptable, such as extra-marital and pre-marital affairs, the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases increases. These diseases may often be a punishment, test or reminder from Allah ﷻ for failure to adhere to His Divine Laws and Guidance. There has also been an alarming increase in the number of pregnancies out of wedlock and a huge rise in legal and illegal abortions. In Islam, abortion is only permitted if pregnancy or childbirth is detrimental to the life of the mother, but *diya* (blood money) must be paid.⁸⁷ Problems arising due to paternity denial or deception, illegitimacy and confused lineage are also detrimental to the natural order, balance and function of society. Brothers and sisters, or even other prohibited relations, may develop relationships later on in life, totally unaware that they are related to one other.

86. Narrated by Ibn Umar ﷺ (Abu Dawud)

87. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muwatta Imam Malik)

The more dysfunctional and unstable families become, the less opportunity children have for spiritual and moral growth. Unhealthy family environments can also encourage other social ills to breed, such as alcohol and drug abuse, psychological problems, mental, physical and sexual abuse, violent crime and so on. Although such behaviour represents the extreme end of the spectrum, it illustrates how easy it is for problems to escalate when mankind lacks God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and correct moral guidance.

People who lack religious, social and moral awareness will often fail to recognise the dangers of promiscuity, fornication, homosexuality and even the opposite extreme - celibacy (sexual abstinence). The more widespread these practices become, the more 'normal' or acceptable they begin to appear. However, this is not the case in Islam. Allah ﷻ has provided man with strict rules and guidelines concerning socio-sexual relationships. Those who disobey Allah ﷻ in favour of following their own lusts and desires will pay heavy penalties in this life and in the Hereafter. The more we adhere to Allah's Laws and Guidance, the more we will benefit, and the fewer problems we will create for ourselves.

Tests with material wealth

The Apostle of Allah ﷺ said: "Verily there is a temptation for every people and the seduction for my people is wealth." ⁸⁸

⁸⁸. Narrated by Ka'b Bin 'Iyad (At-Tirmidhi)

Money is the most powerful motivating force for many people in life, which is why Allah ﷻ tests our faith by our attitude and behaviour towards it. Money is often associated with status, power and prestige and these are the seductive qualities that drive us almost to distraction in order to acquire and accumulate more. People say money can buy happiness, but they also say that money is the root of all evil. In Islam, both sayings apply equally. Money is potentially good and bad, depending on how it is acquired and utilised.

Money can be viewed in many different ways. It can be used solely as a means of sustenance or as a tool for worldly benefit and gain. How money is used is often dependent upon our needs and whether they are real or totally unnecessary. Money can often become an object of worship and instead of devoting our time and energy towards the worship of Allah, we may become more obsessed in the worship of material comforts and pleasures.

'Have you (O Muhammad) seen him who has taken as his god his own desire? Would you then be a Wakil (a disposer of his affairs or a protecting guide) over him?' ⁸⁹

A common plight for many families is trying to 'make ends meet,' especially living in an age of economic uncertainty with the heavy pressures of modern day living. Some financial pressures are unavoidable, such as food, rent, clothing, bills and so on. However, other pressures are often created unnecessarily through wanton greed and could very easily be avoided if we learned to lower our expectations or lived a more realistic lifestyle according to our means.

⁸⁹. Surah Al-Furqan 25:43

The more dysfunctional and unstable families become, the less opportunity children have for spiritual and moral growth. Unhealthy family environments can also encourage other social ills to breed, such as alcohol and drug abuse, psychological problems, mental, physical and sexual abuse, violent crime and so on. Although such behaviour represents the extreme end of the spectrum, it illustrates how easy it is for problems to escalate when mankind lacks God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and correct moral guidance.

People who lack religious, social and moral awareness will often fail to recognise the dangers of promiscuity, fornication, homosexuality and even the opposite extreme - celibacy (sexual abstinence). The more widespread these practices become, the more 'normal' or acceptable they begin to appear. However, this is not the case in Islam. Allah ﷻ has provided man with strict rules and guidelines concerning socio-sexual relationships. Those who disobey Allah ﷻ in favour of following their own lusts and desires will pay heavy penalties in this life and in the Hereafter. The more we adhere to Allah's Laws and Guidance, the more we will benefit, and the fewer problems we will create for ourselves.

Tests with material wealth

The Apostle of Allah ﷺ said: "Verily there is a temptation for every people and the seduction for my people is wealth." ⁸⁸

88. Narrated by Ka'b Bin 'Iyad (At-Tirmidhi)

Money is the most powerful motivating force for many people in life, which is why Allah ﷻ tests our faith by our attitude and behaviour towards it. Money is often associated with status, power and prestige and these are the seductive qualities that drive us almost to distraction in order to acquire and accumulate more. People say money can buy happiness, but they also say that money is the root of all evil. In Islam, both sayings apply equally. Money is potentially good and bad, depending on how it is acquired and utilised.

Money can be viewed in many different ways. It can be used solely as a means of sustenance or as a tool for worldly benefit and gain. How money is used is often dependent upon our needs and whether they are real or totally unnecessary. Money can often become an object of worship and instead of devoting our time and energy towards the worship of Allah, we may become more obsessed in the worship of material comforts and pleasures.

'Have you (O Muhammad) seen him who has taken as his god his own desire? Would you then be a Wakil (a disposer of his affairs or a protecting guide) over him?' ⁸⁹

A common plight for many families is trying to 'make ends meet,' especially living in an age of economic uncertainty with the heavy pressures of modern day living. Some financial pressures are unavoidable, such as food, rent, clothing, bills and so on. However, other pressures are often created unnecessarily through wanton greed and could very easily be avoided if we learned to lower our expectations or lived a more realistic lifestyle according to our means.

89. Surah Al-Furqan 25:43

People often spend too much time chasing the *dunya* (this worldly life) to their own detriment. They may spend their whole lives living off credit or struggling to repay mortgages and high interest loans, just to possess a big house, an expensive car, the latest technology, or exclusive holidays. Some people place very little value or importance on things unless they have a designer label or high price tag attached to them. However, the more they desire to modernise or improve what they have, the more miserable and stressed they become.

The desire to wear expensive clothes, perfume or jewellery, or live a luxurious lifestyle may be for reasons other than greed, personal pride or self-indulgence. A materialist may use his wealth to mask a deep sense of insecurity or dissatisfaction, or use it as a way to boost self-esteem. A materialist may be compensating for spiritual or emotional unhappiness. Spending money or amassing wealth may alleviate boredom or create temporary, superficial excitement, or it may simply be a way to compete with friends and irritate neighbours. Whatever the reason, materialism has the potential to ruin lives. A once healthy desire for financial comfort and security can later develop into a pathological obsession. Some people will go to any lengths in their shameless pursuit of wealth. Family, friends and religious obligations may also take second priority as more time is spent at work or engaged in immoral activities to boost their income.

Materialism is a powerful and potentially self-destructive force. It can corrupt the mind and weaken Iman. Greed and fear of poverty can distract us in our Deen and tempt us to lie, cheat, steal or gamble. Our obedience to Allah ﷻ can easily turn to defiance as we misdirect our worship towards money, rather

than our own Creator. This is a major form of *shirk* and a severely punishable offence.

*'Verily Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom he pleases, and whosoever sets up partners in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin.'*⁹⁰

*'The mutual rivalry for piling up of worldly things diverts you, until you visit the graves (i.e. until you die). Nay! You shall come to know! Again nay! You shall come to know! Nay! If you knew, with a sure knowledge, the end result of piling up, you would not occupy yourselves in worldly things. Verily, you shall see the Blazing Fire (Hell)! And again, you shall see it with certainty of sight! Then on that Day, you shall be asked about the delight you indulged in, in this world.'*⁹¹

Materialism can lead to extravagance, corruption, exploitation, selfishness and greed. It is a well-known fact that many capitalists are corrupt in business. They use cheap raw materials and labour to mass-produce goods at extortionate retail prices. Muslims are warned not to adopt such ways or compromise their religious principles for material worldly gain. Such compromise could take the form of selling alcohol, giving and accepting interest (usury), lying, cheating, stealing and so on. If we desire worldly pleasures at the expense of moral decency, we shall receive our rewards in this life but at the cost of those in the Hereafter.⁹²

90. Surah An-Nisa 4:48

91. Surah At-Takathur 102:1-8

92. Surah Hud 11:15-16

*'...and verily man is heartless and cruel in the love of wealth.'*⁹³

Throughout life, money comes and goes. We may be rich one day and in financial ruin the next. Although we make the effort to produce an income through work, business and trade, Allah ﷻ is the Ultimate Provider, who alone has the Power to give and take away wealth. Allah ﷻ increases and decreases our wealth to test our desire for the vain, superficial fancies of this world and to see if we are grateful for His Kind Generosity and Favours.

*'Who is he that will lend to Allah a goodly loan so that He may multiply it to him many times. And it is Allah that decreases or increases your provisions and unto Him is your final return.'*⁹⁴

*'Allah increases the provision for whom He wills, and straitens it for whom He wills, and they rejoice in the life of this world, whereas the life of this world compared with the Hereafter is but a brief passing enjoyment.'*⁹⁵

On the Day of Judgement, we shall all be accountable for our wealth; for the way in which we acquired it and how we spent it. Reckless spending is condemned in Islam. We are advised to spend moderately according to our means and our real needs, rather than extravagant wanton desires. There are rewards for investing money in property, business or material possessions, providing our intentions are good and it is beneficial to oneself, one's family, the community or society in general. However, some people use their money to pursue corrupt schemes or to buy worldly power and influence. These are actually punishable offences.

93. Surah Al-Aadiyat 100:8

94. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:245

95. Surah Ar-Ra'd 13:26

Some people mis-spend their wealth on non-essential commodities through sheer extravagance. Houses may contain more rooms than are actually needed. Some families may own more cars, television sets or DVD's than are regularly utilised. Items may be bought in bulk or multiples when one item would have happily sufficed. Advertising and hard sell marketing ploys tempt people to purchase more than they really need or want, with attractive offers, bargains, or discounts - two for the price of one, free gifts etc. However, Allah ﷻ warns if we become too absorbed in the material world, we shall never be satisfied. No matter how much wealth or property we have, we will always desire more.

*If the son of Adam had two valleys of gold, he would wish for a third, for nothing can fill the belly of Adam's son except dust (death), and Allah forgives him who repents.*⁹⁶

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Do not hanker after property lest you should be absorbed in the world."⁹⁷

There should be a bedding for a man, a bedding for his wife and the third for the guest, and the fourth one is for the Satan.^{98,99}

Many people squander their money on pursuits that are either haram or not recommended in Islam. These may include entertainment and recreational activities such as pop concerts,

96. Narrated by Anas b. Malik and Ibn Abbas ﷺ (Bukhari and Muslim)

97. Narrated by Abdullah Bin Mas'ud ﷺ (At-Tirmidhi)

98. This does not mean that one should not have the fourth bed. What this implies is that a Muslim should not run after the worldly riches and material possessions and should not in any way waste his wealth in making and keeping with him the things which he does not actually need, but are meant to demonstrate his wealth and glory.

Commentary taken from Footnote. 3. Muslim. Vol.III B, Pg.395

99. Narrated by Jabir b. Abdullah ﷺ (Muslim)

theatre and the cinema (particularly films portraying immorality); music videos, tapes, CD's and mindless computer games; cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and gambling; unnecessary cosmetic and beauty treatments, numerous clothes and jewellery and so on. These examples illustrate how some people waste their money on pointless, potentially harmful or selfish indulgences, which fail to inspire or benefit them in this life or the Hereafter. These activities are often an unnecessary expense for many low-income families, who find it difficult just to meet their basic needs. However, they are still prepared to sacrifice their only income on these selfish lusts and pleasures. Similarly, the disposable income of the affluent could be better spent on more deserving causes. This should not be mis-interpreted to imply that Islam prohibits recreation, as it does not. It is permissible providing it is beneficial; does not contradict or defy the laws of Islam; and does not distract a person from their Islamic duties and obligations.

*'...But spend not wastefully your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Shayatin (devils). And the Shaytan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.'*¹⁰⁰

*'And let not your hand be tied like a miser to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach like a spendthrift, so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty.'*¹⁰¹

Some people use money and material possessions as trophies or symbols of success to reflect their own self-importance. Wealth should never be used to show off or to compete with other people. Ostentation is condemned in Islam as it can provoke

100. Surah Bani-Isra'il 17:26-27

101. Surah Bani-Isra'il 17:29

unnecessary jealousy, rivalry and division between brothers and sisters-in-Islam. Extravagant dinners, wedding celebrations, funerals or *aqiqa* (celebrating the birth of a baby) can easily ruin relationships. Having to oblige friends or relatives with expensive gifts may also cause resentment, especially for those with low incomes. Alternatively they may meet with unnecessary disappointment and ingratitude if expectations of the recipients are too high. In Islam, we are advised to live a simple, moderate life, rather than one based upon materialism and greed. In addition, Islam stipulates we should always show sincere appreciation for any gifts that we receive, no matter how small.

Allah ﷻ may test us with material wealth to see if we can resist the temptation towards selfishness. The more we cherish wealth, the more difficult it is to bear the pains of deprivation and hardship, and the more difficult it is to relinquish when paying *zakat* and *sadaqa* (charity). There are huge rewards for sharing the best of our good fortune, especially with those whose need is greater than ours.

*'That you believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad ﷺ) and that you strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives, that will be better for you, if you but know!'*¹⁰²

*'By no means shall you attain Al-Birr (piety, righteousness, etc. it means here Allah's reward, (i.e. Paradise), unless you spend in Allah's cause of that which you love; and whatever of good you spend, Allah knows it well.'*¹⁰³

102. Surah As-Saff 61:11

103. Surah Al-Imran 3:92

Zakat (obligatory charity) and *sadaqa* (voluntary charity) should be offered in brotherhood, as a token of love to help the poor meet their needs. Furthermore, the intention for giving charity should always be for the reward of Allah ﷻ, rather than for power, control and manipulation. If charity is offered with these intentions, and the recipient knows it, he should reject it.¹⁰⁴ The following ahadith highlight the importance of our 'intentions' prior to offering charity and warn not to boast or broadcast our generosity to other people. Reward will only be granted to those who give charity for the sake of Allah ﷻ rather than for worldly credibility and gain:

*The first of men whose case will be decided on the Day of Judgement will be ...a man whom Allah had made abundantly rich and had granted every kind of wealth. He will be brought before Allah and made to recount His blessings and he will recount them and admit having enjoyed them in his lifetime. He will then say: "I spent money in every cause in which thou wished that it should be spent." Allah will say: "You are lying. You did it so that it might be said about you: 'He is a generous fellow' and so it was said." Then will Allah pass orders and he will be dragged with his face downward and thrown into Hell.*¹⁰⁵

*If anyone wants to have his deeds widely publicised, Allah will publicise his humiliation. And if anyone makes a hypocritical display of his deeds, Allah will make a display of him.*¹⁰⁶

Money is only useful in this life, if it is spent in the way of Allah to earn His blessings and rewards. We are allowed to live a

¹⁰⁴. Footnote 3. Muslim. Vol.II A, Pg.90

¹⁰⁵. Narrated by Sulaiman b. Yasar ﷺ (Muslim)

¹⁰⁶. Narrated by Ibn Abbas ﷺ (Muslim)

luxurious life, providing it is not to excess and we remember to pay *zakat* every year, payable at 2.5% of the value on excess money, merchandise or property, if a full year has passed over it.¹⁰⁷ People who fail to pay *zakat* will receive a befitting punishment on the Day of Judgement. A poisonous serpent with two black spots on its head will be a yoke around their neck. It will seize them by the jaws and declare; 'I am your wealth. I am your treasure!'¹⁰⁸ A bald serpent whose mouth will be open and will gnaw at their hand like a male camel, will pursue owners of property, treasure and money.¹⁰⁹ Owners of cattle, goats and sheep will be gored by their horns, bitten and trampled under their hooves.¹¹⁰ Owners of gold and silver will be cauterised with plates of fire on their sides, forehead and back. These three body parts are meaningfully referred to, as it is with wrinkles on the forehead that a person looks down on the poor. He also turns aside to avoid them or turns his backs on them without paying them their due.¹¹¹

The punishment for hoarding money is severe:

*Give glad tidings to those who hoard their riches that their backs would be branded so deeply that the hot iron would come out of their sides. And when the backs of their necks would be branded, it would come out of their foreheads.*¹¹²

Money may have value in this life but it will be worthless in the Hereafter. Paradise cannot be bought at any price. Wealth,

¹⁰⁷. Narrated by Nafi ﷺ (Muwatta Imam Malik)

¹⁰⁸. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Bukhari)

¹⁰⁹. Narrated by Jabir b. Abdullah ﷺ (Muslim)

¹¹⁰. Narrated by Jabir b. Abdullah Al-Ansari ﷺ (Muslim)

¹¹¹. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim) Footnote to hadith

¹¹². Narrated by Ahnaf b. Qais ﷺ (Muslim)

power and worldly influence will not impress or improve our position in the Hereafter. We should therefore, invest our money wisely in this life, for the life still yet to come, as we will not be able to take it with us when we die. If we want to be successful in the Hereafter, the most important balance to watch, is not the one in the bank, but the one weighing up our good deeds. Instead of stocking up on non-essential treasures and hoarding our money, we should concentrate more on increasing our acts of charity and worship as they will help to expiate our sins and earn success in the Hereafter:¹¹³

*'...as for him whose balance of good deeds weighs heavy, he will have a pleasant life in Paradise. But as for him whose balance of good deeds weighs light, he will have his home in the blazing fire (Hell).'*¹¹⁴

*Do not hold back otherwise Allah will withhold from you.*¹¹⁵

*'But he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient, and gives the lie to the Best. We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Misery. Nor will his wealth profit him when he falls headlong into destruction (into the pit).'*¹¹⁶

Poverty

The other end of the economic spectrum is poverty. No matter how financially secure we think we are, if we are destined for poverty, then we cannot escape it. A slight change in circumstances could send a once healthy bank balance 'into the red'.

113. Narrated by Abu Wa'il (Bukhari)

114. Surah Al-Qari'ah 101:6-11

115. Narrated by Asma' bint Abu Bakr (Agreed Upon)

116. Surah Al-Lail 92: 8-11

Ill health, redundancy or dismissal may prevent us from working; demotion, a cut in salary or a change from full-time to part-time employment may also reduce our regular incoming wage. Bankruptcy and receivership; lawsuits and litigation; internal theft, fraud or deception; fire, drought or flood can also mark the end of a once thriving business. We are, therefore, advised to take advantage of our wealth while we still have it but to also prepare for the possibility of poverty.

*Take advantage of five things before five others occur: your youth before you grow old; your health before you become sick; your wealth before you become poor; your leisure before you become busy; and your life before you die.*¹¹⁷

*Prepare a complete armour for poverty, as it will overtake us quicker than a flood which flows towards its destination.*¹¹⁸

Allah ﷻ may send poverty as a punishment, a test, or a simple reminder to be more appreciative of His Kind Favours. Poverty may be relatively short lived, intermittent or prolonged throughout life. However, there are huge rewards if we remain patient during straightened economic circumstances.

The poverty trap can be a vicious circle. It restricts social movement, stifles opportunity and limits freedom of choice. It suffocates one with feelings of powerlessness, fear, frustration and stress and may tempt us to acquire money through immoral means or to beg (which is discouraged in Islam). In Islam, we are advised to earn money through halal means from our own manual labour (even if we sell sticks as firewood).¹¹⁹

117. Narrated by 'Amr bin Maymun al-'Awdi (At-Tirmidhi)

118. Narrated by Abdullah bin Mughaffal (At-Tirmidhi)

119. Narrated by Abu Huraira (Muwatta Imam Malik)

Although the income derived from it may be small, our efforts would, at least, be blessed and rewarded by Allah ﷻ and the money will have *barakah*. Although the shaytan will delude us with poverty, Allah ﷻ reassures us that He will always provide sufficiently for our needs and often from the most unexpected sources.

*'Shaytan threatens you with poverty and orders you to commit sins; where as Allah promises you forgiveness from Himself and Bounty, and Allah is All Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All Knower.'*¹²⁰

*'And He will provide for him from sources he never could imagine. And whoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him.'*¹²¹

The Prophet ﷺ said: *"If anyone who is afflicted with poverty refers it to me, his poverty will not be brought to an end; but if anyone refers it to Allah, He will soon give him sufficiency, either by a speedy death or by a sufficiency which comes later."*¹²²

In the last hadith, speedy death has been explained as the death of a rich relative. Hence, the person afflicted with poverty may get property through an inheritance.

The Prophet ﷺ, his wives and children were not unfamiliar with poverty, as they often went to bed without eating for several successive nights.¹²³ To curb his hunger, the Prophet ﷺ would

120. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:268

121. Surah At-Talaq 65:3

122. Narrated by Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ (Abu Dawud)

123. Narrated Ibn Abbas ﷺ (At-Tirmidhi)

eat nothing but small quantity of cheap dates¹²⁴ or barley bread and when he died, there was nothing to eat in Ai'sha's house except a small quantity of barley in a container.¹²⁵ How many of us can claim to have experienced true poverty and hunger when we live in a society with food in such abundance?

Poverty can be a very degrading and de-humanising position to be in. It is also one that is frowned upon by those in wealthier positions. However, if we patiently endure poverty for Allah's sake and continue to do good deeds, He will reward us with a more dignified position in Paradise, insha'Allah. It is stated quite clearly in the Qur'an that the inhabitants of Paradise will be those who endured poverty and material hardship, while the rich will be held back, (unless they are otherwise destined for the Hellfire). This is because a lifetime spent in poverty causes greater pain and distress than a lifetime spent in affluence and shall be rewarded accordingly. It is reassuring to note that the inmates of Paradise shall live in affluent circumstances for eternity. They will have food in abundance. Their clothes will never wear out and they shall never become destitute.¹²⁶

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: *"The poor will enter Paradise 500 years ahead of the rich."*¹²⁷

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said; *"I stood at the gate of Paradise and saw that most of those who passed through it were poor, where as the rich were held back but those who were destined to go to Hell, were ordered to be sent there."*¹²⁸

124. Narrated by An Nu'man bin Bashir ﷺ (Muslim)

125. Narrated by Ai'sha ﷺ (Agreed Upon)

126. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim)

127. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (At-Tirmidhi)

128. Narrated by Usama bin Zaed ﷺ (Agreed upon)

In Islam, a poor, pious Muslim is considered to be superior to all the wealthy men on this earth put together as the following hadith re-iterates:

*A man passed by Allah's Messenger ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ asked a man sitting beside him, "What is your opinion about this passer-by?" He replied, "This passer-by is from the noble class of people. By Allah, if he should ask for a lady's hand in marriage, he ought to be given her in marriage, and if he intercedes for somebody, his intercession will be accepted." Allah's Messenger ﷺ kept quiet and then another man passed by and Allah's Messenger ﷺ asked the same man his opinion on the second man. He said: "O Allah's Messenger! This person is one of the poor Muslims. If he should ask a lady's hand in marriage, no one will accept him, and if he intercedes for somebody, no one will accept his intercession, and if he talks, no one will listen to his talk." Then the Prophet ﷺ said, "This man is better than such a large number of the first type (i.e. the rich men) as to fill the earth."*¹²⁹

If we devote more of our time to spiritual contemplation and prayer, our hearts will become filled with contentment and our poverty will be removed or at least become more tolerable. It will also help us to appreciate Allah's favours and be more grateful for the things we have, rather than resentful for the things we do not and may never have:

*'And remember when your Lord proclaimed: "If you give thanks (by accepting Faith and worshipping none but Allah), I will give you more (of My Blessings), but if you are thankless (i.e. disbelievers), verily! My punishment is indeed severe."*¹³⁰

¹²⁹. Narrated by Sahl bin Sa'd As-Sa'idi (Bukhari)

¹³⁰. Surah Ibrahim 14:7

*Allah ﷻ says: "O son of Adam, if you set aside some time for my service, I will fill your heart with contentment and remove your poverty; and if you spend no time in My service, I will keep your hands busy in work and will not remove your poverty."*¹³¹

Material status is not the Islamic criterion for measuring a person's worth. Instead, every individual will be judged according to his level of Iman and good deeds. The Islamic definitions for wealth and prosperity are as follows:

*He who enters the fold of Islam and is provided with sustenance which is sufficient for his needs and Allah makes him content with what he has bestowed upon him, has achieved true prosperity.*¹³²

*The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Riches do not mean having a great amount of property, but riches are self-contentment."*¹³³

*...The rich are in fact, the poor (little rewarded) on the Day of Judgement except him who gives wealth which he gives (in charity) to his right, left, front and back, and does good deeds with it.....*¹³⁴

It is also important to remember the true Islamic definition for a pauper. A real pauper is a man who is bankrupt on the Day of Judgement, when he discovers all his good deeds have been diminished by his bad deeds.

¹³¹. Narrated by Abu Huraira (Ahmad, Ibn Majah)

¹³². Narrated by Abdullah bin 'Amr bin Al'As (Muslim)

¹³³. Narrated by Abu Huraira (Agreed upon)

¹³⁴. Narrated by Abu Dhar (Bukhari)

When the Prophet ﷺ asked, "Do you know who is a pauper?" The companions answered, "A pauper is one among us who has neither cash (i.e. money) nor property." Then the Prophet ﷺ said, "A pauper is one among my people who appears on the Day of Judgement having performed salah, paid zakat, fasted and performed other obligations, but who has also abused someone, slandered someone, misused the money of a third, shed the blood of a fourth and beaten a fifth person. Each of them (i.e. those whom he sinned against) will then be given a portion of his good deeds, then their sins will be transferred to his account, and thus he will be thrown into the fire of hell."

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Tests involving children

Allah ﷻ created us with a natural desire to have children and although He may bestow them upon us, we often take them for granted. Allah ﷻ provides children as a blessing and a test. He entrusts them into our care so that we may love them and guide them in the correct manner according to Islam. Unfortunately, many people assume that children are merely a matter of course in life, or things to play with in this material world. They seem to be totally unaware of the more serious obligation they should have towards Allah ﷻ.

*'Wealth and children are the adornments of the life of this world.'*¹³⁶

135. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Muslim)

136. Surah Al-Kahf 18:46

*'O you who believe! Let not your properties or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And whosoever does that, then they are the losers.'*¹³⁷

Although children are a test, they should never be perceived as a burden or a hindrance. Allah ﷻ provides us with children for many reasons, but they are never meant to inconvenience or cause difficulty, as clarified in the following verses:

*'Allah does not want to place you in difficulty, but He wants to purify you, and to complete His Favour on you that you may be thankful.'*¹³⁸

*'Allah intends ease for you, and he does not want to make things difficult for you.'*¹³⁹

Children should never be resented or abused. Instead, they should be treated with justice and kindness and given the rights that they are entitled to. These rights extend to unborn children as well. One of the rights of children is the right to life itself. Couples should bear this in mind when contemplating the abortion of an unwanted baby. In Islam, all babies are 'wanted', in the sense that Allah ﷻ destines all pregnancies (souls), and only He has the authority to terminate life. As mentioned before, abortion procedures are only permissible if pregnancy or childbirth causes danger to the life of the mother.¹⁴⁰ Abortion is not permitted for reasons of economical burden or shame for being the 'wrong sex'. Allah makes this quite clear in the Qur'an in many verses.

137. Surah al-Munafiqun 63:9

138. Surah Al-Maidah 5:6

139. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:185

140. Al-Fatawa by Sheikh Shaltut, Pg. 164

*'Indeed lost are they who have killed their children, from folly, without knowledge, and have forbidden that which Allah has provided them...'*¹⁴¹

*'And kill not your children for fear of poverty; We provide for them and for you. Surely the killing of them is a great sin.'*¹⁴²

It cannot be denied that children are an additional expense, as they require food, clothing, schooling and so on. However, as parents, we should always provide for them according to our means, and not according to their wants and desires. These days, many children demand expensive clothes, trainers, entertainment and so on. If these demands are beyond our price range, children should be made aware of this and taught to appreciate whatever they are given, regardless of cost. When times are hard, it is often difficult to imagine how we will ever find the means to satisfy demand. However, Allah ﷻ is the Best Provider, so we should continue in our efforts and endeavours and place our full trust in Allah ﷻ to help provide. The following hadith emphasises this point:

*The Prophet ﷺ said: "If you all had trusted in Allah with due reliance, He would have certainly given you provision as He supplies provisions to birds who get up hungry in the morning and return with full belly at dusk."*¹⁴³

Children can be a trial in many different ways. The relationship we have with our child(ren) may test our strength of faith and character or our sense of responsibility. The love we have for our children may also be in direct competition with our love

141. Surah Al-An'am 6:140

142. Surah Bani Isra'il 17:31

143. Narrated by Umar bin Al-Khattab (At-Tirmidhi)

towards Allah ﷻ. If more love is directed towards the child than to Allah ﷻ, there is the risk of committing *shirk*. Children may also distract us in our Islamic duties and responsibilities by causing us to delay our prayers; persuading us to protect them by lying; or encouraging us to squander money on unnecessary pleasures. Our child(ren)'s ideals or beliefs may also conflict with our own. They may either cause us to become stronger in faith or contemplate life from a completely non-Islamic viewpoint. Our attitude towards our children and towards our role as parents, should always remain Islamic if we are to gain the Pleasure and Reward of Allah ﷻ.

Children may test our patience. They may restrict our freedom; test our levels of tolerance or reduce our level of disposable income. However, they can also enrich our lives, bringing with them much love, happiness and joy. We should not view children negatively as we can earn many rewards by them, especially if we love and care for them and raise them with sound Islamic morals and manners. These responsibilities also apply to children that may not be our own genetically, such as orphans or children from a spouse's previous marriage. Children can also help to earn more rewards for us after our death, if they supplicate to Allah ﷻ on our behalf.¹⁴⁴

We will be accountable for the welfare and wellbeing of our children, at least until they reach the age of puberty. It is also our responsibility, as parents, to safeguard our family members from the Hellfire. All children are born in the natural state of Islam (*fitra*). However the upbringing and development of the child is greatly influenced by the parents.

144. Narrated by Abu Huraira (Muslim)

When children love their parents, they often imitate them blindly in their traditions, politics, attitudes and behaviour and particularly their religion. It is therefore important to ensure our children learn the correct ways and teachings of Islam and provide them with good role models.

There is no child who is not born in the natural state (i.e. Islam). After that his (non-Muslim) parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian. ¹⁴⁵

'O you who believe, ward off from yourselves and your families a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are appointed angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey Allah in what He orders them and do precisely what they are commanded.' ¹⁴⁶

Islam is a complete way of life, encompassing vast fields of knowledge and endeavour, so it is essential for children to learn about Islam at an early age, preferably from birth onwards. They should learn how to perform everyday Islamic duties and tasks. These range from personal hygiene (such as cleaning teeth and personal grooming, bathroom etiquette, wudhu) to social norms and behaviour; virtues in personal conduct; Islamic character (*adab* and *ikhlaq*) to religious rites and duties (*salah*, *zakat*, fasting, Hajj etc.)

Children are our future. If we raise them correctly, we will not only gain Allah's Reward and Pleasure, but through them we may preserve and strengthen the teachings and identity of the Islamic faith.

145. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Bukhari and Muslim)

146. Surah At-Tahreem 66:6

-3-

WISHING FOR DEATH

Towards the end of time, tests will increase both in number and severity. People will continue to indulge in worldly pleasures, and forget their duties and responsibilities to Allah ؓ. As a result, corruption and turmoil will become more widespread and our ability to endure tests will become increasingly more difficult. As the basic moral fabric of society decays, we will struggle against greater temptations and be surrounded by fewer positive role models. We will eventually experience so many tests that many of us will wish for death, just to escape the harsh realities in life:

Time will pass rapidly, good deeds will decrease, miserliness will be thrown (in the hearts of people), afflictions will appear and there will be much 'Al-Harj'. They said: "O Allah's Messenger ؓ! What is Al-Harj?" He said: "Killing! Killing!" ¹⁴⁷

The hour will not be established until the living wish to be in the place of the dead (lit. In the place of the people in the graves). ¹⁴⁸

Although the desire for death may seem more attractive than the prospect of living, we are warned not to yearn for it. Instead we should accept our tests with patience and tolerance.

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None of you should desire death because of an injury that afflicted him. If there is no alternative action, let him pray: "O Allah! Give me life as long as life will be good for me and take away my life when death will be good for me." ¹⁴⁹

None amongst you should desire death, and do not invoke for it before it comes, for when any one of you dies, he ceases to do good deeds and the life of a believer is not prolonged but for goodness. ¹⁵⁰

Suicide is condemned in Islam as this despicable act signifies a person weak in character and faith. In Islam, all life is considered sacred. It is created and owned by Allah ﷻ and only He has the ultimate Power and Authority to take it away. We are warned not to self-harm or to take our own lives, as we shall all bear witness against ourselves on the Day of Judgement (i.e. our body parts will speak against us concerning what we used to do). Suicide is also regarded as one of the seven most destructive sins:

'On the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their legs and feet will bear witness against them as to what they used to do.' ¹⁵¹

'...And do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another). Surely, Allah is Most Merciful to you.' ¹⁵²

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Avoid the seven great destructive sins." They (the people) asked, "O Allah's Messenger! What are they?" He said, "1) To join partners in worship with Allah,

149. Narrated by Anas bin Malik ﷺ (Agreed Upon)

150. Narrated by Hammam b. Munabbih ﷺ (Muslim)

151. Surah An-Nur 24:24

152. Surah An-Nisa 4:29

(2) to practise sorcery; (3) to kill the life which Allah has forbidden except for a just cause (according to Islamic law); (4) to eat up Riba (usury); (5) to eat up the property of an orphan; (6) to show one's back to the enemy and fleeing from the battlefield at the time of fighting and (7) to accuse chaste women who never even think of anything touching their chastity and are good believers." ¹⁵³

The Prophet ﷺ warned that people who commit suicide will continue to take their life over and over again in the Hellfire using the same instrument or method. Similarly, if any pain or distress was experienced, it will also be continually experienced in the Hellfire (and more than was experienced in this life). Paradise will also be denied to those who commit suicide, as stated in the following ahadith:

...And whoever commits suicide with a piece of iron, will be punished with the same piece of iron in the Hellfire. ¹⁵⁴

He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the Hellfire (forever), and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself in the Hellfire (forever). ¹⁵⁵

A man was inflicted with wounds and he committed suicide, and so Allah said: My slave has caused death on himself hurriedly, so I forbid Paradise for him. ¹⁵⁶

153. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Bukhari)

154. Narrated by Thabit bin Ad-Dahhak ﷺ (Bukhari)

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Although tests may be difficult to endure at times, we should never try to escape from our afflictions or simply give up. Instead our strength of faith should support us through any calamity, while our moral steadfastness should prevent us from even contemplating suicide, let alone doing it. It may be a quick and easy solution but it is also a cowardly and futile one. Allah ﷻ never tests us with a test more than we can bear and after every test, He will provide relief. Relief may either represent a change in our present situation or at least a change in our attitude towards it. Hence, we should endure our tests to the bitter end to reap the full benefits in this life and the Next (i.e. the rewards from Allah, expiation of our sins, opportunity for improvement and ultimately Paradise, insha'Allah).

*'Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope...'*¹⁵⁷

*'Verily, with every hardship, there is relief.'*¹⁵⁸

157. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:286

158. Surah Al-Inshirah 94:5

~4~

COPING DURING TESTS AND HARDSHIPS

Although we should never wish for calamities, we should always be prepared for any eventuality in life. The better prepared we are, the better we will be able to cope during times of difficulty. The following six coping strategies may help us to develop a more positive attitude towards our tests. Although these are good coping strategies, they are also an Islamic obligation and ones that will be highly rewarded by Allah ﷻ:

- i. Strengthening faith through worship
- ii. Turning to Allah in times of need
- iii. Placing hope and trust in Allah
- iv. Maintaining patience
- v. Looking at people worse off
- vi. Detaching oneself from this world

i. Strengthening faith through worship

*The worship at the time of tribulations is equal to the emigration to me.*¹⁵⁹

159. Narrated by Ma'qil bin Yasar ؓ (Muslim)

Although tests may be difficult to endure at times, we should never try to escape from our afflictions or simply give up. Instead our strength of faith should support us through any calamity, while our moral steadfastness should prevent us from even contemplating suicide, let alone doing it. It may be a quick and easy solution but it is also a cowardly and futile one. Allah ﷻ never tests us with a test more than we can bear and after every test, He will provide relief. Relief may either represent a change in our present situation or at least a change in our attitude towards it. Hence, we should endure our tests to the bitter end to reap the full benefits in this life and the Next (i.e. the rewards from Allah, expiation of our sins, opportunity for improvement and ultimately Paradise, insha'Allah).

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i. Strengthening faith through worship

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The best coping strategy to adopt during times of difficulty is worship, as it helps to boost Iman and provides spiritual comfort and support. It can also provide some sense and meaning to the pain and suffering we may be experiencing. Worship has many dimensions and is not solely confined to salah. It incorporates everything we do with the intention of pleasing Allah ﷻ - remembrance of Allah, keeping good company and gaining knowledge, reading the Qur'an and so on. During times of distress, we should make more effort in these activities.

Remembrance of Allah: Constant or prolonged tests are often emotionally debilitating. Hence, we should try to develop a strong, positive Islamic attitude towards all our afflictions. We should remind ourselves of Allah ﷻ and refer constantly to His Glorious names and attributes (and, of course, there are 99 names to choose from!). The following ayat highlight the importance of du'a, prayer and *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah):

*'So remember me - I will remember you.'*¹⁶⁰

*The difference between the one who remembers his Lord and the one who does not is like the difference between the living and the dead.*¹⁶¹

*'So when the Qur'an is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy. And remember your Lord by your tongue and within yourself, humbly and with fear without loudness in words in the mornings and in the afternoons and be not of those who are neglectful.'*¹⁶²

160. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:152

161. Narrated by Abu Musa ؓ (Bukhari)

162. Surah Al-A'raf 7:204-205

Prayer is essential for gaining the help, support and guidance from Allah ﷻ. We should always ask Him directly for help (without an intercessor), which we may do by referring to past good deeds that were performed sincerely to gain His Pleasure.¹⁶³ For example, you may say, 'Oh Allah, if in your knowledge I carried out 'such and such' a deed, purely for your sake, please accept it and assist me in my time of need.'

Keeping good company and gaining knowledge: The company we keep is also important, as people not only influence the way we think, but also the way we behave. As Muslims, we should constantly strive to reach Islamic perfection in our attitude and behaviour. If our Iman weakens or our good conduct deteriorates after associating with people of un-Islamic character, we will only have ourselves to blame when called to account for it on the Day of Judgement. Although friends and family may influence our position in the Hereafter, they will not be able to help us on that Day. We should, therefore, be more discriminating in our choice of friends and associates.

*A person inevitably follows the faith of his friends, therefore be careful in choosing your friends.*¹⁶⁴

The Prophet ﷺ instructed us to keep good company with pious believers who can offer us sound Islamic advice and help boost our Iman when levels are low. We should always exercise caution in spending too much time with people who fail to advise wisely, by using their own desires or opinions rather than Islamic knowledge and do little to encourage or inspire us in our Deen.

163. Narrated by Ibn Umar ؓ Bukhari. Vol.4, Pg.446, No.671

164. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi)

*'And keep yourself (O Muhammad ﷺ) patiently with those (i.e. your companions) who remember their Lord (with glorification, praising in prayers and other righteous good deeds) morning and afternoon, seeking His Face, and let not your eyes overlook them, desiring the pomp and glitter of the life of this world; and do not obey those whose hearts are heedless of His Remembrance, one who follows his own lusts and whose deeds are lost.'*¹⁶⁵

*Those who leave a gathering after having made no mention of Allah leave it like the corpse of a donkey and suffer remorse.*¹⁶⁶

The more ignorant we are of Islam, the more difficult it will be to withstand trials in life. This is why Allah ﷻ has made it obligatory for Muslims to increase their knowledge in Islam. However, we should be extra vigilant about the type of knowledge we acquire, as we shall be held accountable for it on the Day of Judgement. Our knowledge of the Deen should always be authentic, according to the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, and beneficial as should our worldly knowledge and education. We should also convey our knowledge to others, as it will help to benefit them and continue to earn rewards for us, even after our death:

*A servant will remain standing on the Day of Judgement until he is asked about four things: about his age and in what he spent it, about his knowledge and what he did with it, and about his wealth and from where he acquired it and in what he spent it; and about his body, in what he used it up.*¹⁶⁷

165. Surah al-Kahf 18:28

166. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Abu Dawud)

167. Reported by ad-Darimi and at-Tirmidhi who said: Hasan Saheeh

*When the son of Adam dies his acts come to an end but three. Recurring charity, or a kind of knowledge by which people derive benefit, or a pious son who invokes for him Allah.*¹⁶⁸

Reading and Reciting the Qur'an: The Qur'an was revealed as a guidance and a means of spiritual comfort and support for those who believe. Consequently, reading and reciting the Qur'an is a good way to gain knowledge and boost Iman. Knowledge can also be gained from the Books of Sunnah as well as Islamic books written by scholars or knowledgeable brothers or sisters. A good way to gain knowledge is to attend Islamic study circles.

*'And We sent down from the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe (in Islamic Monotheism and act upon it) and it increases the dhalimun (polytheists and wrong doers) nothing but loss.'*¹⁶⁹

*'So when the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and be silent that you may receive mercy...'*¹⁷⁰

ii. Turning to Allah in times of need

Every test is willed for reasons only known to Allah ﷻ and only He is able to remove our afflictions. No matter how hard we try to escape our troubles, we will never be able to, unless of course, Allah ﷻ wills it Himself.

*If Allah touches you with harm, none can remove it but He, and if He touches you with good, then He is able to do all things.*¹⁷¹

168. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Muslim)

169. Surah Al-Isra 17:82

170. Surah Al-'Araf 7:204

171. Surah Al-An'am 6:17

*'No calamity befalls, but with the Leave [decision and Qadr] of Allah, and whosoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart [to the true faith with certainty, i.e. what has befallen him was already written for him by Allah from the Qadr] and Allah is the All-Knower of everything.'*¹⁷²

We should always turn to Allah ﷻ in times of need for help and guidance. This is something the Prophet ﷺ did constantly.

*Allah's Messenger ﷺ used to seek refuge with Allah from the difficult moment of calamity and from being overtaken by destruction and from being destined to an evil end and from the malicious joy of enemies. Sufyan said, "This narration contained three items only, but I added one. I do not know which one that was."*¹⁷³

Allah ﷻ will always respond to the believing Muslim who makes du'a when in distress, and when seeking guidance in decision-making (*Istikharah*).

We should always turn to Allah ﷻ initially for help, before we consult other people about our problems, as only He has the ultimate power to alleviate them. In many cases, tests are brought to an end almost as soon as they have begun. In other cases, Allah ﷻ may deliberately lengthen His tests or delay His response to our plights to test our loyalty or patience. This is the time when we may start to lose faith and give in to shaytan or our own *nafs* (desires). For example, if we are tested with poverty, we may be tempted to earn money through haram means. Money through immoral means can be acquired in a very short period of time, often with very little effort.

172. Surah At-Taghabun 64:11

173. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Bukhari). From other sources it seems that the expression 'the malicious joy of enemies' is the item added by Sufyan.

This is why it can be so easy to give in to temptation. However, we should always remain Allah-fearing in everything we do. No matter how desperate our situation may become, Allah ﷻ will always provide for us.

*'And He will provide for him from sources he never could imagine. And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him.'*¹⁷⁴

Allah ﷻ always responds to our cries for help. The more we turn to Him, the more likely He is to respond, and the more we remember Him, the more He will grant us mercy, protection and forgiveness during times of difficulty.¹⁷⁵ The following ahadith explain how Allah ﷻ eagerly responds to our plight in times of need:

*Allah ﷻ says: "When a servant of mine advances towards me a foot, I advance towards him a yard, and when he advances towards me a yard, I advance towards him the length of his both arms spread out. When he comes to me walking, I turn to him running."*¹⁷⁶

*Your Lord is Generous, and is ashamed to turn away empty the hands of His servant when he raises them to Him.*¹⁷⁷

iii. Placing hope and trust in Allah

No sooner do we overcome one test then another one inevitably follows. This cycle will continue for the rest of our lives until

174. Surah At-Talaq 65:3

175. Narrated by Abu Huraira ﷺ (Agreed Upon)

176. Narrated by Anas ﷺ (Bukhari)

177. Narrated by Salaman ﷺ (Abu Dawud)

death finally takes us. Accordingly, we need to adopt a more positive attitude towards our tests. This can be achieved by having hope and trust that Allah ﷻ will give us the strength and patience to endure our tests; hope and trust that Allah will reward us for being patient; and hope and trust that Allah will soon remove our calamity and provide ease.

The Prophet ﷺ drew a square and then drew a line lengthways through the middle extending out. He then drew several small lines across the central line and said: "The middle (central) line represents the man and his desires, the square is his death encompassing him all around, and the short lines are his trials and obstacles in life. If one of those misses him, another distresses him and if that one misses him, he falls victim to another." 178

'And be patient; verily Allah loses not the reward of the good-doers.' 179

iv. Maintaining patience

'Verily man (disbeliever) was created very impatient. Irritable (discontented) when evil touches him and niggardly (miserly) when good touches him.' 180

Unfortunately man is created impatient. That is why Allah ﷻ tests our faith according to our levels of patience during times of difficulty and during times of ease. The more patient we are, the more rewards we will reap in this life and the Next.

178. Narrated by Abdullah ﷺ (Bukhari). Narrated by Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ (Bukhari)

179. Surah Hud 11:115

180. Surah al-Ma'arij 70:19-21

Allah ﷻ ultimately knows what is best for His creation. He never sends harm, unless it is to benefit us in some way. We should, therefore, be content with His final Judgement and Decision, and fight any ill feelings we may have towards our misfortunes. Pessimism and uncertainty leads to doubt and mistrust, which is insulting and disrespectful to Allah ﷻ. Instead we should aim to develop a more trusting, confident and positive attitude towards our fate and patiently make the best of (what may appear to be) a bad situation.

'Only those who remain patient shall receive their rewards in full without reckoning.' 181

'They will be given their reward twice over, because they are patient...' 182

When we are overwhelmed by a difficult test, it may be tempting to question 'why?' or criticise its timing. Allah ﷻ is the Creator and Controller of time. He manages all our affairs and causes everything to happen at the right time for the right reasons. If Allah ﷻ wills for us something good, no one except He has the power to change it. Similarly, if Allah ﷻ wills difficulty, no one has the power to remove it, except Him. Although tests may seem difficult, Allah's Help is always near if we call upon Him, and with every hardship, He will provide ease.

During severe tests, the Prophet ﷺ and His companions used to ask how long they would have to wait for the Help of Allah. Allah ﷻ responded with the following verse:

181. Surah Az-Zumar 39:10

182. Surah Al-Qasas 28:54

*'Do you think that you shall enter Paradise without such trials, as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him cried: "When will come the help of Allah?" Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is always near.'*¹⁸³

Patience is not always easy to maintain as we are not naturally inclined to be this way. We have to make a conscious effort to control our *nafs* (desires), fight temptation and place our affairs in the full trust of Allah ﷻ. Patience is a virtue highly rewarded by Allah ﷻ. In fact there are no limits to the rewards that can be gained for showing patience. Sins are expiated, du'as are accepted, and entry into Paradise is guaranteed to those who remain patient throughout adversity:

*Allah ﷻ said: "I have no reward other than Paradise for my believing servant who is patient when I take away one of his beloved from among his companions of the world."*¹⁸⁴

*'Do you think that you will enter Paradise before Allah tests those of you who fought (in His cause) and also tests those who are patient?'*¹⁸⁵

When the answers to our du'as are delayed, we may grow weary and impatient; we may then give up supplicating altogether. However, Allah ﷻ will only help those who are willing to help themselves and making du'a is just one way to show willing. Allah ﷻ will always respond to our du'as if we remain patient, but it is His Decision whether to grant our request in this life or

183. Surah al-Baqarah 2:214

184. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Bukhari)

185. Surah al-Imran 3:142

in the Hereafter.¹⁸⁶ Hence, patience may need to be maintained for years, perhaps an entire lifetime. However, the greater our patience, the greater our rewards will be, insha'Allah.

*(Allah) grants the invocation of anyone of you if he does not show impatience (by saying): "I invoked Allah but my request has not been granted."*¹⁸⁷

v. Looking at people worse off

Often we compare our lives to those in better positions, or to those who appear to have greater happiness. This can incite feelings of jealousy, bitterness and resentment and as a result we may find it more difficult to tolerate tests of deprivation or hardship, or show appreciation for Allah's Favours. This is why the Prophet ﷺ advised us to compare our lives to people who appear to be worse off, as our good deeds can easily be destroyed through envy.

*Look at those who are inferior to you and do not look at those who are superior to you, for this will enable you to appreciate better the favours of Allah. It will keep you away from despising Allah's favours to you.*¹⁸⁸

*Avoid envy, for envy devours good deeds just as fire devours fuel (wood or grass).*¹⁸⁹

Occasionally, we may desire similar skills, abilities or qualifications as other people, or perhaps we would like to be

186. Commentary taken from Abu Dawud. Footnote to hadith

187. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Bukhari)

188. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Muslim)

189. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Abu Dawud)

similar to them in character, knowledge or piety. In Islam, envy towards a fellow Muslim is condemned, with the exception of two cases: envy of a Muslim with wealth, if he spends it generously in Allah's cause, or towards a Muslim with good Islamic knowledge, if he acts upon it and conveys it to other people.¹⁹⁰

Allah ﷻ created us to excel in some things more than in others. Although this may appear unfair, the balance will be rectified on the Day of Judgement, when we shall be held individually to account for the way we used our own unique skills, talents and abilities. We will not be rewarded for possessing certain abilities if we failed to use them. Similarly, we shall be held accountable as to whether or not we fulfilled our Islamic duties and worldly responsibilities. This is reassuring to know especially when the life of another person appears to be more relaxed or less restrictive than your own. As mentioned before Allah ﷻ is never unjust. Each of us is assigned certain duties to fulfil and obligations to uphold. These require a certain amount of time and commitment. If a person appears too relaxed, they are probably not fulfilling their duties properly. Alternatively, their Iman may not be as high as your Iman, and consequently they may not be able to accept the same amount of responsibility as you.

*'And wish not for the things in which Allah has made some of you to excel others. For men there is a reward for what they have earned, and likewise for women there is reward for what they earned.'*¹⁹¹

190. Narrated by Abdullah bin Mas'ud ﷺ (Bukhari)

191. Surah An-Nisa 4:32

Allah ﷻ is fair and just in everything. We should not expect equal favours, or equal tests, as we are not identical in character, neither do we share the same level of Iman. If we are tested more than other people are, we should feel honoured and grateful to Allah ﷻ for the opportunity to earn more of His reward.

*The greatness of reward is accompanied by the greatness of distress. If Allah ﷻ desired a people, He sorely tried them by torment. And if He is pleased with that, all the content is for them, and that whom He is annoyed with, all the wrath is for them.*¹⁹²

vi. Detaching oneself from this world

Another successful coping strategy involves detaching oneself from this world. Instead of chasing the *dunya* (this worldly life) with all its temptations and distractions, we should abstain from it and concentrate more on our investment towards life after death. If we set our expectations too high, we will always be bitterly disappointed. Therefore, we should gracefully accept whatever Allah ﷻ wills, rather than despair over what could have been. When misfortune strikes, we should relish its continuance for the reward it brings, rather than dwell on missed opportunities or worldly losses:

Following the rule of abstinence from worldly things does not mean that what is normally permitted becomes prohibited or that wealth should be allowed to go to waste. On the contrary, such abstinence means that you should place greater reliance

192. (Tirmidhi, Riyad us-Saliheen)

on what Allah ﷻ intends for you than on what you have in hand yourself. And when misfortune strikes, you should relish its continuance for the reward this will bring. ¹⁹³

As well as adopting an indifferent attitude towards this world, we should also reconsider the role we play within it. Our life here on earth is short. Hence, we should not become too attached to it. Instead, we should consider ourselves as mere strangers passing through, taking just enough provisions from it to satisfy our most basic needs.

Be in this world as if you were a stranger. ¹⁹⁴

If we can remind ourselves of our own mortality and acknowledge the imminent possibility of death, we may be able to cope better, especially if we perceive that each problem could be our last. Each problem overcome is one more test passed and one more chance to earn rewards before we die. This understanding should encourage us to live each day as though it were our last. This life is temporary and will soon end, but our life in the Hereafter is real and will last for eternity. We should, therefore, strive hard to secure a good position in Paradise, rather than suffer the everlasting torment in the Hellfire. The following quotations compare the value attached to this life and the next:

'Truly, this life of the world is nothing but a (quick passing) enjoyment, and verily, the Hereafter that is the home that will remain forever.' ¹⁹⁵

193. Narrated by Abu Dharr Al-Ghafari ﷺ (Tirmidhi)

194. (Bukhari)

195. Surah Al-Mu'min 40:39

There is no life worth living except the life of the Hereafter. ¹⁹⁶

'Know that the life of this world is only amusement and play, pomp and mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children. The life of this world is only a deceiving enjoyment.' ¹⁹⁷

A small place equal to an area occupied by a whip in Paradise is better than the whole world and what ever is in it; and an undertaking journey in the forenoon or in the afternoon for Allah's cause, is better than the whole world and what ever is in it. ¹⁹⁸

'Beautified for men is the love of things they covet; women, children, much of gold and silver (wealth), branded beautiful horses, cattle and well tilled land. This is the pleasure of the present world's life; but Allah has the excellent return (Paradise with flowing rivers, etc.) with Him.' ¹⁹⁹

Although we should emotionally detach ourselves from this world, we should not do so to the point of social isolation and alienation. It may sometimes be tempting to withdraw altogether from society, to avoid *fitna* (temptation and strife). But however attractive this may seem, we may actually be reducing the opportunity of earning Allah's rewards or hurting people's feelings, through not accepting social invitations; not performing acts of kindness and charity; not earning a living or giving *da'wa* and so on. We should, therefore, distance our-

196. Narrated by Anas ﷺ (Bukhari)

197. Surah Al-Hadid 57:20

198. Narrated by Sahl ﷺ (Bukhari)

199. Surah Al-Imran 3:14

selves from the people or the situations that create unnecessary *fitna*, but not from the people or the situations that will help us to strive in Allah's Cause.

A believer who mixes with people and endures the harm they may cause is better than the believer who neither mixes with people nor endures the harm they may cause. ²⁰⁰

Although this life is insignificant compared to the life in the Hereafter, it is still relatively important as the transitory voyage towards it. This life is not a dress rehearsal. Once we depart from this world, we will not be given a second chance to correct or repent for any mistakes we have made. It is, therefore, vital that we pay close attention to our emotions, actions and behaviour, and ensure they are in accordance with the Laws of the Islamic Shar'iah and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

200. Narrated by Ibn Umar ؓ (At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah)

~5~

FAILING A TEST

One of the most fundamental Islamic beliefs is the concept and role of Destiny (*Qadr*). Belief in Allah's Divine Decree is the source for our unfailing strength of faith, determination, and motivation. In Islam, there is no excuse for indolence and inactivity. We should never feel paralysed by our hardships. Instead, we should patiently endure them, and ask Allah ﷻ to help us overcome them. Even if we fail to do so, we will still be rewarded for our efforts in the Hereafter.²⁰¹ Although self-scrutiny, guilt and remorse are redeeming qualities of a practising Muslim, we should never brood regrettably over the past. Everything that happens in life is predestined. It is therefore a waste of time and energy worrying how things might have been if only we had behaved differently. Doubt and supposition are from Shaytan and open the door to many other negative thoughts and feelings.

A strong believer is better and more loveable to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone, (but cherish that which gives you benefit in the Hereafter) and seek help from Allah and do not be disabled, and if anything in the form of trouble comes to you, don't say: "If I had done that, it would have happened so and so", but say: "Allah did what he had ordained", and your 'if' opens the gate for Satan. ²⁰²

201. Footnote to Muslim hadith

202. Narrated by Abu Huraira ؓ (Muslim)

Following difficult tests, the most common reactions are often feelings of inadequacy, disappointment and failure. We may also judge and criticise our methods of coping and calculate how many rewards we must have lost. However, in Islam, there is no room for negativity and pessimism. Only Allah ﷻ knows how many rewards we earn or lose during a test. He also grants mercy and forgiveness to every believer who sincerely repents and makes amends for their failings. Some tests aim to remind us of our own fallibility. On reflection, we are able to identify our faults and weaknesses and concentrate on areas that require improvement. The only time we will ever fail is when we stop practising Islam or turn away from Allah ﷻ altogether.

‘And those who having done an act of indecency or wronged their own souls - remember Allah and ask for forgiveness for their sins. And who can forgive sins except Allah. And are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in the wrong they have done.’ 203

Allah the Exalted has said: “Son of Adam, I shall go on forgiving you as long as you call Me and expect for My Forgiveness whatever may be your sins. I care not, son of Adam, even if your sins should be numerous as to reach the lofty regions of the sky, you should supplicate to Me for forgiveness and I shall forgive you; Son of Adam, if you come to Me with an earth full of sins and meet Me not associating anything with Me, I will grant you as much pardon as will fill the earth.” 204

203. Surah Al-Imran 3:135

204. Narrated by Anas ؓ (At-Tirmidhi)

CONCLUSION

All trials and tribulations are willed by Allah ﷻ to distinguish between those who believe in Him and those who do not, and to distinguish between those who follow Islamic Monotheism or other faiths and beliefs. They also aim to test the sincerity and strength of our faith, to purify our soul and expiate our sins. Each test is individually tailored to suit our level of faith, tolerance and endurance, which is only known by Allah ﷻ as He only tests as much as we can bear.

We are often tested with our most prized possessions - loved ones, wealth, career, hobbies, desires and passions. Allah ﷻ may give, take or deprive us of these things, to test our desire for this life against the rewards that can be gained in the next. We are also tested in our loyalty and obedience to him. If we chase immoral worldly pleasures, we do so at the expense of earning these rewards. However, if we sacrifice these pleasures, we will protect ourselves from the punishment of the Blazing Hellfire.

Muslims can adopt a number of strategies for coping during times of difficulty and hardship. The best strategy to maintain is a strong faith, as tests are often less tolerable when faith is weak. Praying, reading and reciting the Qur'an, adopting good company and attending study circles and Islamic activities, all help to boost Iman. Adopting positive, Islamic attitudes and behaviours will also help to alleviate our pain and suffering during times of affliction. Patience, reliance and trust in Allah ﷻ will help to reduce stress, so too will detaching ourselves from

this world and looking at people who appear to be worse off than ourselves.

Every problem in life has an Islamic solution. If we turn to Allah ﷻ in times of need and ask for His Help and Support, we will receive it. But if we choose to deny Him and turn away from Him, then He will turn away from us. The more patient we are during times of difficulty, and the more we strive in Allah's Cause, the more rewards we shall reap in this life and the Next. The greatest reward, of course, is entry into Paradise. May Allah ﷻ help us endure our tests more patiently for His sake, and protect us from evil desire and temptation. May He ﷻ protect us from the punishment of the Grave and the Hellfire and grant us entry into Paradise by His Gracious Mercy (ameen).

SPECIAL DU'AS

Du'a for Istikhara (seeking help from Allah for decision making)

Jabir bin Abdullah ﷺ said: "The Prophet ﷺ used to teach us to seek Allah's counsel in all matters, as he used to teach us a Surah from the Qur'an. He would say: "When anyone of you has an important matter to decide, let him pray two raka'h other than the obligatory prayer, and then say:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّيْ اَسْتَخِيْرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ ، وَاسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ ، وَاسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيْمِ ، فَاِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا اَقْدِرُ ، وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا اَعْلَمُ ، وَاَنْتَ عَلَامُ الْغُيُوْبِ ، اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ اَنَّ هَذَا الْاَمْرَ خَيْرٌ لِّيْ فِيْ دِيْنِيْ وَمَعَاشِيْ وَعَاقِبَةِ اَمْرِيْ

or he said

عَاجِلِ اَمْرِيْ وَآجِلِهِ فَاقْدُرْهُ لِيْ وَيَسِّرْهُ لِيْ ، ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِيْ فِيْهِ وَاِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ اَنَّ هَذَا الْاَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِّيْ فِيْ دِيْنِيْ وَمَعَاشِيْ وَعَاقِبَةِ اَمْرِيْ

or he said

عَاجِلِ اَمْرِيْ وَآجِلِهِ ، فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّيْ ، وَاصْرِفْنِيْ عَنْهُ ، وَاقْدُرْ لِيْ الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ رَضِّنِيْ بِهِ

Allahumma inni astakhiruka bi'ilmika wa astaqdiruka biqudratika, wa as'aluka min fadlika'l-Azeem, fa'innaka taqdiru wa la aqdiru, wa ta'lamu, wa la a'lamu, wa anta Allamu'l-ghuyub, Allahumma in kunta ta'lamu anna hadha'l-amra khairun li fi dini wa ma'ashi wa 'aqibati amri aw qala 'ajili amri wa ajilihi. Fa'qdur hu li wa yassirhu li thumma barik li fihi, Wa in kunta ta'lamu anna hadha'l-amra sharrun li fi dini wa ma'ashi. Wa 'aqibati amri aw qala 'ajili amri wa ajilihi, fasrif hu anni wasrifni 'anhu wa'qdur liya'l-khayra haythu kana thumma radini bih. (Bukhari, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i & Ibn Majah)

(Oh Allah, I seek Your Guidance (in making a choice) by Your Knowledge, and I seek the help by Your Power, and I ask of Your magnificent Grace. Surely You are capable and I am not. You know and I know not, and You are the Knower of the unseen. Oh Allah, if in Your Knowledge, this matter is good for me, in my religion, my life and in my affairs, then ordain it for me and make it easy for me, and bless me in it. And if this matter is bad for me, in my religion, my life and in my affairs, then distance it from me, and distance me from it, and ordain for me what is good wherever it is to be found and help me to be pleased with it).

Du'a for Removing Poverty

Someone who was in debt came to Ali bin Abi Talib ؑ and said: 'I am unable to pay my debt so help me'. He said; 'Shall I not teach you a few words the Messenger of Allah ﷺ taught me. If you had a mountain (seerin) of debt Allah would fulfil it on your behalf?' Say:

اللَّهُمَّ اكْفِنِي بِحَلَالِكَ عَنْ حَرَامِكَ، وَاغْنِنِي بِفَضْلِكَ عَمَّنْ سِوَاكَ

Allahumma'kfini bi halalika 'an haramika wa'ghnini bi fadhlika 'amman siwaka. (At-Tirmidhi)

(O my Lord make me with what you have made lawful needlessly of what You have made lawful, and make me with your benevolence independent of others).

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْهَمِّ وَالْحَزَنِ وَالْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ وَالْبُخْلِ وَالْجُبْنِ
وَضَلَعِ الدَّيْنِ وَغَلَبَةِ الرِّجَالِ

Allahumma inni a'udhu bika mina'l-hammi wa'l-hazani, wa'l-'ajzi wa'l-kasali, wa'l-bukhli wa'l-jubni, wa dala'id-dayni wa ghalabati'r-rijal. (Bukhari)

(O Allah, I seek refuge in you from worry and grief, from incapacity and laziness from cowardice and miserliness, from being heavily in debt and from being over powered by others).

Du'a in Times of Distress

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي عَبْدُكَ ابْنُ عَبْدِكَ ابْنُ أَمَتِكَ نَاصِيَتِي بِيَدِكَ مَاضٍ فِي حُكْمِكَ
عَدْلٌ فِي قَضَاؤِكَ أَسْأَلُكَ بِكُلِّ اسْمٍ هُوَ لَكَ سَمِيَتْ بِهِ نَفْسُكَ أَوْ عَلِمَتْهُ
أَحَدًا مِنْ خَلْقِكَ أَوْ أَنْزَلَتْهُ فِي كِتَابِكَ أَوْ اسْتَأْثَرْتُ بِهِ فِي عِلْمِ الْغَيْبِ
عِنْدَكَ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ الْقُرْآنَ رَبِيعَ قَلْبِي وَنُورَ صَدْرِي وَجَلَاءَ حُزْنِي وَذَهَابَ
هَمِّي

Allahumma inni 'abduka ibnu 'abdika ibnu amatika nasiyati bi

yadika, madin fiyya hukmuka 'adlun fiyya qada'uka, as'aluka bi kulli ismin huwa laka, sammayta bihi nafsaka, aw 'allamtahu ahadan min khalqika, aw anzaltahu aw'ista'tharta bihi fi 'ilmi'l-ghaybi 'indaka, an taj'ala'l-Qur'ana rabi'a qalbi, wa nura sadri, wa jala'a huzni, wa dhihaba hammi. (Ahmad and Ibn Hibban)

(O Allah, I am your slave the son of Your slave, the son of your female slave. My forelock is in Your Hands. Your Judgement upon me is assured. Justice upon me is Your Command. I ask You by every Name You have, with which You have named Yourself, taught any one of Your creation, revealed in Your Book, or taken unto Yourself in the realm of the unknown, to make the Qur'an the spring of my heart, and the light of my breast, the banisher of my sadness and the reliever of my despondency).

At times of distress the Prophet ﷺ would say:

يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوْمُ بِرَحْمَتِكَ أَسْتَغِيْثُ

Ya hayya ya Qayyumu, bi rahmatica astaghithu. (At-Tirmidhi)

(O Living, O Sustainer, in your mercy I plead for rescue)

اَللّٰهُمَّ لَا سَهْلَ اِلَّا مَا جَعَلْتَهُ سَهْلًا، وَاَنْتَ تَجْعَلُ الْحَزْنَ اِذَا شِئْتَ سَهْلًا

Allahumma la sahla illa ma ja'altahu sahlan wa anta taj'alu'l-hazna idha shi'ta sahlan. (Ibn Hibban and Ibn As-Sunni)

(O Allah, there is nothing made easy except what you make easy, and you make the difficult - if You wish - easy)

اِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَاِنَّا اِلَيْهِ رَاْجِعُوْنَ، اَللّٰهُمَّ عِنْدَكَ اَحْتَسِبُ مُصِيْبَتِيْ فَاجْرِنيْ فِيْهَا وَاَبْدِلْنِيْ مِنْهَا خَيْرًا.

Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un. Allahumma 'indaka ahtasibu musibati. Fa'jurni fiha wa abdilini minha khayra. (Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Al-Hakim)

(To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return. O Allah, you suffice me in disaster. So reward me for it and replace it with something, which is good).

Du'a for the Sick

1) For the sick patient

اَسْأَلُ اللّٰهَ الْعَظِيْمَ رَبَّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيْمِ اَنْ يَشْفِيْكَ

As'alu'llaha'l-'azima Rabba'l-'arshi'l-'azimi an yashfiyaka. (At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud)

(I ask Almighty Allah, Lord of the Magnificent Throne, to make you well) Repeat this 7 times in Arabic when you visit a patient

2) For yourself if you are sick

Put your right hand on the affected part of your body and say three times 'Bismillah' then say the following seven times:

اَعُوْذُ بِاللّٰهِ وَقُدْرَتِهِ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا اَجِدُ وَاُحَاذِرُ

A'udhu billahi wa qudratihi min sharri ma ajidu wa uhadhir
(Muslim)

(I seek refuge with Allah and His ability from what I find and from what I suffer from)

Du'a for Patience

رَبَّنَا أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَتَوَفَّنَا مُسْلِمِينَ

Rabbana'frigh 'alayna sabran wa tawaffana muslimin. (7:126)

(Our Lord, pour out on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto thee as Muslims)

Du'a for worry during Sleep

أَعُوذُ بِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ التَّامَّةِ مِنْ غَضَبِهِ وَشَرِّ عِبَادِهِ وَمِنْ هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ
وَأَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ

A'udhu bi kalamati'llahi at-tammati min ghadabihi (wa iqabihi not in Abu Dawud) wa sharri 'ibadihi, wa min hamazati'sh-shayatina wa an yahdurun. (Abu Dawud)

(I seek refuge with Allah's perfect words from His wrath, punishment, the evil of His creatures and the whispering of the devils or that they come near.)

OVERCOMING TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

'You shall certainly be tried and tested in your wealth and properties and in your personal selves.' (3:186)

Allah will continue to test us throughout life in many different ways and for many different reasons. This book attempts to evaluate the different types of tests we may experience throughout life, why they occur, how to cope with them successfully and the significance they have in relation to this life and our final destiny in the Hereafter. It also highlights the problems we may unnecessarily create for ourselves if we choose to defy Allah's Divine Laws and Guidance.

This book is inspiring and uplifting while providing an Islamic perspective on the significance of trials and tribulations in life.



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